

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 216–218

(٢١٦) كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ ۖ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۖ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

(٢١٧) يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ ۖ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ ۖ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ ۖ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَن دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا ۖ وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

(٢١٨) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Fighting has been prescribed for you, and it is (an object of) dislike to you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you; and Allah knows, while you do not know. (216)

They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter; and hindering (men) from Allah's way and denying it, and (hindering men from) the Sacred Mosque and turning its people out of it are still graver with Allah, and the mischief is graver than the killing; and they will go on fighting with you so that they may turn you back from your religion if they can; and whoever of you turns back from his religion, then dies while an unbeliever – these it is whose deeds are forfeited in this world and the hereafter; and they are the inmates of the fire; therein shall they abide. (217)

Surely those who believed and those who fled (their home) and strove hard in the way of Allah, these hope for the mercy of Allah; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (218)

Commentary

Qur'an: *Fighting has been prescribed for you, and it is (an object of) dislike to you:*

It has repeatedly been explained that *kitabah* (writing, الكتابة), which has been translated here as prescription, means an obligatory command, if used in the matter of legislation, and a firm decree, if used in the matter of creation.

This verse, therefore, shows that fighting in the way of Allah is compulsory for all believers (as the verse is addressed to them) except those who are exempted by other verses or traditions. For example:

There is no blame (in staying behind) on the weak, nor on the sick, nor on those who do not find what they should spend, so long as they are sincere to Allah and His Apostle ... nor on those who when they came to you that you might carry them, you said: I cannot find that on which to carry you ... (9:91—92)

The verb, *kutiba* (has been written, اكتب) is in the passive voice, because it is followed by the phrase, ***and it is (an object of) dislike to you.***

It was not proper to mention clearly the name of the writer (i.e. Allah) of a writing which was to be an object of dislike to the believers. By not using the active voice, the verse protected the sanctity of the divine name and removed every chance of slight to it.

Kurh (dislike, أكره) is the hardship felt by man in his self, naturally or otherwise. *Karh* (compulsion, أكره) is the hardship forced upon him by extraneous agencies as when he is forced to do a work which he does not like to do. Allah says:

... it is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against (their) will ... (4:19);

... so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly ... (4:11)

Why was the ordained fighting to be an object of dislike to the believers? Three explanations have been given for it:

1) Fighting entails loss of limbs and lives, economic hardship, monetary loss and the deterioration of law and order; goods necessary for life disappear from the market and become scarce; and many other things crop up in society which man dislikes by nature.

Allah has praised the believers in His book and said that a group of them were sincere in their faith and successful in their endeavours. But, at the same time, He has admonished another group of them because of their shaky belief and crooked thinking, as may be seen in the verses revealed about the battles of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq etc.

The people addressed by this verse were, therefore, of two types: One, steadfast in their faith, who could not dislike any command of Allah; the other, those who might dislike them, and this second group was more numerous.

Therefore, it was quite in order to describe such a mixed group as disliking an order, especially when those disliking it were in the majority.

2) The believers were aware that the unbelievers were well-prepared for fighting and had more strength and material support than the Muslims.

3) They, therefore, thought that fighting at that particular time would not be in the interests of the Muslims; hence, the order to fight should be delayed for some other suitable time.

This postponement would give them time to increase their manpower, war-material and martial strength.

Allah told them in this verse that they were mistaken in this view, because Allah in this affair has a purpose which shall surely be attained; He knows the hidden reality of everything while their knowledge is confined only to the apparent facts.

4) The believers were well-trained by the Qur'an, and, accordingly, they felt clemency towards the creatures of Allah, and mercy and pity had become second nature to them.

They did not like fighting with the unbelievers, as it meant that a number of their adversaries would die in disbelief, and the believers were not pleased about that.

They would have liked to deal with those adversaries with good humour, and live with them with nobleness and gentleness, inviting them to Islam with good exhortation, hoping that they would come to the right path.

They thought that in this way, they would protect themselves from death, and the unbelievers from dying in disbelief and entering into eternal fire.

Allah, in this verse, made it clear that this thought of theirs was not correct. Allah, Who ordained the fighting knew very well that the call of truth would have no effect on those misguided souls who were spiritually a total failure.

The true religion could not expect any good from them either in this world or in the next. They were in humanity like a totally degenerated limb which will certainly infect other organs if not removed from the body by a surgical operation.

These are the explanations given for the words of Allah, ***and it is (an object of) dislike to you.***

But the first one is the most appropriate, especially if we look at the verses admonishing a group of believers (referred to in the explanation) and keep in view the passive voice of the verb, ***has been***

written on you, i.e., has been prescribed for you.

Qur'an: and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you: It has already been explained that the words like “may be” and “perhaps”, when used in divine speech, mean “it is hoped”.

This hope is related not to the speaker (Allah) but to the hearers. In other words, when Allah says: **may be it is so** it does not mean that He hopes it will be so (Elevated be He from such uncertainties!); rather it means that the hearers should hope or expect it in this way.

The repetition of “may be” in this sentence and the following one

(and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you)

means that the believers disliked fighting and loved peace; so Allah told them that they were mistaken in both. If the sentence is framed without repeating the word “may be” (i.e. ‘and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you or love a thing while it is evil for you’) it will convey the idea that “your dislike and love have no significance, because such feelings are often misplaced.”

Such a sentence is addressed to the one who has erred in something, for example, if one dislikes meeting a certain person. But if he has erred in two things — e.g., he dislikes mixing with the people and loves seclusion — then the norms of elocution demand that he should be warned against both tendencies, e.g. ‘you are neither justified in your dislike, nor are you right in your love; it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing and it is evil for you; because you do not know the unseen, and, therefore, you cannot find your way towards the hidden realities of any thing.’

As the believers, in addition to their dislike of fighting, also loved peace and ease (as is implied in the previous verse:

or do you think that you would enter the Garden while yet the like of those who passed away before you has not come upon you).

Allah pointed to both mistakes in two separate sentences:

it may be that you dislike ...

and

it may be that you love ...

Qur'an: and Allah knows while you do not know:

This is the final step in making their mistake known to them. Allah has gradually made them realise that they were in manifest error. To begin with, He told them that it was possible that they were mistaken in

their dislike of the fighting

(it may be that you dislike ...).

Their minds accepted the implication of those two sentences; and thus they were freed from their compound ignorance, as now they felt doubtful about the correctness of their views.

When that stage was reached, Allah told them clearly that the order which you dislike is ordained by Him who is not unaware of the hidden realities of the things, while your views are based on your psyche which knows only that much which it has been allowed by Allah to know.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to leave all such decisions into His hand.

The verse proves that knowledge, in its reality and totality, is Allah's only; and others have no knowledge of their own at all. This reality is explained in many other verses:

Allah, surely nothing is hidden from Him ... (3:5),

and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases... (2:255).

And some explanation about fighting has been given in the verse 2:190,

And fight in the way of Allah...

Qur'an: They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it:

The verse contains the prohibition of fighting in the sacred month. Then it goes on to say that disbelief and turning the people of the Sacred Mosque out of it are far graver sins and that the mischief is graver than the killing.

These sentences show that there must have occurred some incident which prompted the believers to ask the question, and that there was some killing in that incident, but that killing was not intentional. (See the last verse:

Surely those who believed ... these hope for the mercy of Allah.)

All these pointers confirm what has been described in the traditions that some believers had killed an unbeliever unknowingly in the sacred month in a battle, and that the unbelievers had ridiculed the Muslims for it. The incident was that of 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his companions.

Qur'an: Say, fighting, in it is a grave matter; and hindering (men) from Allah's way and denying it and (hindering men from) the Sacred Mosque ...:

"Allah's way" means worship and virtuous actions and especially the pilgrimage (*hajj*). Apparently the pronoun "it" in "denying it" refers to "Allah's way"; thus it would mean denial in practice, not in faith.

And “the Sacred Mosque” is in conjunction with “Allah’s way”, and means ‘hindering from Allah’s way and the Sacred Mosque’.

The verse clearly shows that fighting in the sacred month is forbidden.

It has been said that this verse was abrogated by the verse:

then slay the idolaters wherever you find them (9:5)

but this view is not correct, and some explanation about it have been given in the commentary of the verses of fighting.

Qur’an: and turning its people out of it are still graver with Allah, and the mischief is graver than the killing:

What the idolaters had done — turning the Apostle of Allah and the believers out of the Sacred Mosque (and they were truly the people of the Sacred Mosque) — is far graver than fighting.

And the mischief done by them in rebuking the believers, and calling them back to disbelief is graver than killing. Therefore, they have no right to reprove the believers for killing when they themselves had committed far graver sins.

So far as the believers are concerned, they still hope for the mercy of Allah, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Qur’an : and they will go on fighting with you so that they may turn you back ... :

hatta (حتى) means “till”; but here it signifies cause or purpose. That is why it has been translated here as “so that”.

Qur’an: and whoever of you turns back ... these it is whose deeds are forfeited ... and they are inmates of fire:

It threatens apostates with the forfeiture of their deeds and an eternal abode in the Fire.

Forfeiture of Deeds

Forfeiture (*habt*, الحبط) means nullification of a deed and invalidity of its effects. Whenever this word is used in the Qur’an, it is always related to deeds; for example,

Surely, if you associate (others with Allah), your deed will certainly be forfeit and you will certainly be of the losers. (39:65)

Surely those who disbelieve and turn away from Allah’s way and oppose the Apostle, after that

guidance has become clear to them, cannot harm Allah in any way, and He shall make null their deeds. O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the, Apostle, and do not make your deeds of no effect. (47:32—33)

If we compare the last phrases of both verses, we shall see that the nullifying of the deeds is the same as the deeds being of no effect. This meaning is more clearly seen in the verse:

and what they wrought in it shall be forfeit, and vain (null and void) is what they do. (11:16)

and nearer to it is the word of Allah,

And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust. (25:23)

In short, *habt* (الحبط) of deeds means their coming to nothing and their being of no effect. It has been said that it is derived from *habata* (حبط) which is used when an animal over-eats and its stomach distends, often resulting in its death.

The effect of forfeiture (*habt*, الحبط) as described by Allah, is nullification of the deed in both worlds, here as well as in the hereafter. Forfeiture has a connection with the deeds and it affects the life hereafter.

The faith beautifies this world's life as well as it makes the life hereafter a pleasant one. Allah says:

Whoever does good, whether male or female, and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We shall most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did (16:97).

Also it is clear, without any shadow of doubt, that the endeavours of the unbeliever are lost and his deeds are of no effect in this world; and it is especially true in the case of the man who turns back towards infidelity, leaving the true faith.

His heart cuts itself away from its anchor in this stormy life — the anchor being belief in the One and only God. He has nowhere to turn — where he can express his joyful thanks when blessed with a bounty, find solace when confronted with a misfortune, and to whom he can pray when in need of something. Allah says:

Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness whence he cannot come forth? (6:123)

This verse shows that the believer has in this world a good life and a light in his actions which the disbeliever does not possess. Also Allah says:

... then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy. And whoever turns

away from My remembrance, his shall surely be a straitened life, and We will raise him, on the day of resurrection, blind. (20:124)

This verse also proves that the life of the unbeliever in this world is a straitened one, full of difficulties, and that a believer's life, in contrast, is a blessed, happy and pleasant one.

All this explanation, together with the cause of both groups' happiness and unhappiness respectively, is given in this short verse:

That is because Allah is the Master of those who believe, and because the unbelievers have no master for them. (47:11)

It appears from the above details that deeds (*a'mal*, الأعمال) here means all the actions done by a man so as to attain happiness in life. The meaning of "deeds" in this context is not confined to the apostate's acts of worship and other virtuous deeds done by him when he was a Muslim.

Moreover, the forfeiture of deeds has been mentioned even in connection with those who do not perform any act of worship, for example, disbelievers and hypocrites. It clearly proves that it is not only acts of worship which are forfeited. See, for example, the verses:

O you who believe! If you help (the cause of) Allah He will help you and make firm your feet. And (as for) those who disbelieve, for them is destruction, and He has let their deeds go astray. That is because they disliked what Allah revealed, so He rendered their deeds null (47:7–9);

Surely (as for) those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah and slay the prophets unjustly and slay those among men who enjoin justice, announce to them a painful chastisement. Those are they whose deeds shall become null in this world, as well as the hereafter, and they shall have no helpers. (3:21–22)

There are many verses like these.

The gist of the verse under discussion, like other verses of forfeiture, is that disbelief and apostasy make the deeds ineffective, i.e., such deeds lose their power to make life blissful.

On the other hand, true faith and belief give life to the deeds and they create felicity, bliss and happiness in life. If someone acquires true faith after disbelief, his deeds are given a new life and they become effective in making life blessed and happy (although they were forfeit and ineffective before).

Likewise, if he apostatizes after having been a believer, all his deeds become dead, null and void; they cannot make life in this world or in the here after happy.

Thereafter, if he leaves his apostasy and comes back to the fold of Islam, it is hoped that his deeds will be revived; but if he dies in the apostasy, the forfeiture will have been confirmed and misery and

unhappiness will be written down for him.

This explanation is enough to show that the controversy about the forfeiture of the deeds of an apostate — whether it is affected at the time of apostasy or at his death — is baseless. That controversy is as follows:

Some people say that those deeds of an apostate which were done before his apostasy remain preserved until his death, and that if he does not return to the true faith before his death, they will become forfeit on his death.

Their argument is based on this very verse which is under discussion:

and whoever of you turns back from his religion, then dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose deeds are forfeited in this world and the hereafter ...

They also bring in their support the verse:

On the day when they shall see the angels ... And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so we shall render them as scattered floating dust. (25:22—23)

This verse describes the condition of unbelievers at the time of death; and it implies that if the apostate had returned to the true belief, those deeds which he had done before apostasy would have remained valid.

Others say that apostasy nullifies deeds completely; and they do not return to him even if he comes back to the true belief. Of course, the deeds done after his return to the true belief do belong to him.

According to them, the verse contains the words, “then dies while an unbeliever” because it purports to show the condition of all his actions done during his life in this world.

But the explanation given by us shows that there is no ground here at all for any such controversy. The verse in fact conveys the meaning that all his actions and deeds become ineffective in the meaning that they cannot bring any bliss, felicity or happiness in his life.

There are two other questions here, somewhat related with the above one: The first is the theory of *ihbat* (الاحباط). It is the theory that good and evil deeds cancel each other.

Some people said that actions cancel and invalidate each other. These people are further divided in two groups: One says that every subsequent evil deed cancels the preceding good one, and vice versa.

It means that at any given time a man has in his account either good only or evil only. The other group says that there is a system of counterbalancing good and evil deeds; the weight of the lighter side is deducted from the weightier side, the balance remaining on account.

This theory, like the previous one, means that at the end there remains in the man's account only good or only evil actions — if any balance is left after the said counter balancing.

Both these views are wrong, because:

First: Allah says in the Qur'an;

And others have confessed their faults, they have mingled a good deed and an evil one, maybe Allah will turn to them (mercifully); surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (9:102)

This verse clearly says that there are some good deeds and some evil ones, and that they will remain written in the account of the doer in their original form until the mercy of Allah decides about them. This cuts away the roots of the theory of cancellation with all its interpretations.

Second: Allah uses the same system of reward and punishment that is used by reasonable men in this world — rewarding the good deed and punishing the evil one, each separate from the other.

Of course, if one commits a sin that cuts away the relationship between Master and servant (e.g. disbelief or idolatory), then all his deeds become forfeit. There are numerous verses to prove it; and there is no need to quote them here.

The second related question is the theory of *takfir* (التكفير). *Takfir* (التكفير) is the belief that the actions do not cancel each other; every action is preserved — a good action has its own effect and an evil one its own.

But, as clearly mentioned in the Qur'an, a good deed sometimes atones for, and removes, an evil one. Allah says:

O you who believe! If you fear Allah, He will grant you a distinction and remove from you your evil ... (8:29);

then whoever hastens off in two days, there is no sin on him, and whoever tarries (there) there is no sin on him (2:203);

If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins ... (4:31).

Not only this, but some good deeds change an evil action into a good one, as Allah says:

Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (25:70)

There is another matter which is like the basis of all these questions: When and where does the doer become entitled to recompense? Some have said: it is the time of the action.

Others have said: the time of death. Still others have said: the hereafter. And a fourth group has said: it is the time of the action but only if the doer continues in the same condition upto his death.

Every group offers various verses of the Qur'an in support of its view, and some add some rational argument too.

Let us say that reward and punishment, forfeiture and atonement are the effects of the deeds themselves (as we have explained in our commentary of verse 2:26).

It follows that the human soul, as long as it is connected with the body, is subject to changes in its qualities. When man does something good, there appears in his soul a spiritual quality which entitles it to receive the reward; and when he commits a sin, the spiritual quality appearing in his soul entitles it to receive chastisement.

As man in this world is subject to change from one condition to other, (because he continues to mingle good deeds with evil ones), his present spiritual quality may possibly be changed to its opposite as a result of his subsequent deeds. This goes on till death overtakes him.

The soul departs from the body, actions stop, changes cease, potentialities come to an end, and qualities acquired upto that time are firmly established in his soul in a way that it no longer accepts any change or alteration (except through the mercy of Allah or intercession by His chosen servants).

Or let us say, as we have said earlier, that Allah uses the same system of recompense as is used by reasonable men in this world. It means that obedience or disobedience to divine laws and their recompense follows the same method which is seen in social laws.

Reasonable people praise and commend the law-abiding and obedient man as soon as he does something good, and condemn a disobedient man as soon as he does something wrong.

But, at the same time, they know that the said commendation or condemnation may be changed in the future, because the man concerned may alter his ways.

In short, the praise or condemnation is offered at once, but its continuation depends on the man's continuing in the same way in the future.

But an ever-lasting praise or ever-lasting condemnation, not subject to any further change, will attach to him when there is no longer any possibility of change in his quality, i.e. by death or by the loss of potentiality.

These explanations are enough to show that all the above mentioned views on this subject have, in one way or the other, deviated from the truth, because they have based their discourse on wrong premises.

The truth is as follows:

First: A man becomes entitled to reward or punishment as soon as he does whatever he does; but that reward or punishment is still subject to change or alteration. It is only on death that it is confirmed without any possibility of alteration, as we have described above.

Second: The same is the case with the forfeiture of deeds as a result of disbelief, etc. The deeds become forfeited as soon as the man disbelieves, etc. But the forfeiture is confirmed at death.

Third: Forfeiture applies not only to the deeds related to the hereafter, but to those connected with this world also.

Fourth: *Ihbat* (الاحباط) i.e., the theory of good and evil deeds cancelling each other is wrong. But *takfir* (التكفير) is correct — the belief that good actions sometimes expiate evil ones.

An Essay On The Rules Governing Actions

A) About Their Reward And Punishment

There are various rules about the actions of man and their recompense, which are enumerated here:

1) There are some sins which cause the forfeiture of good deeds in this world and the hereafter. One is apostasy. Allah says in the verse under discussion:

and whoever of you turns back from his religion then dies while an unbeliever, these it is whose deeds are forfeited in this world and the hereafter.

2) Other such sin is disbelief in the signs of Allah and enmity towards them. Allah says:

Surely (as for) those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah and slay the prophets unjustly and slay those among men who enjoin justice, announce to them a painful chastisement. Those are they whose works shall become null in this world as well as the hereafter ... (3:20—21)

Likewise, there are some acts of obedience, like (submission to) Islam and repentance, that expiate the evil deeds of this world as well as the hereafter; Allah says:

Say: O My servants! Who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; Surely Allah forgives the faults (sins) altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord (repent before Him) and submit to Him before there comes to you the punishment, then you shall not be helped. And follow the best that has been revealed to you from your Lord ... (39:53—55).

Also, he says... then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy. And whoever turns away from My remembrance, his shall surely be a straitened life, and We will raise him, on the day of resurrection, blind. (20: 123—124)

3) There are some sins which cause the forfeiture of some of good deeds. Such, for example, is opposition to the Prophet. Allah says:

Surely those who disbelieve and turn away from Allah's way and oppose the Apostle after that guidance has become clear to them, cannot harm Allah in any way, and He shall make null their deeds. O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle, and do not make your deeds of no effect (null and void). (47:32—33)

A comparison between the two sentences implies that the order of “obedience” of the Apostle is the same as the prohibition of his opposition, and *ibtal* (nullification of the deed, الإبطال) is its forfeiture.

Another such sin is raising one's voice above the voice of the Prophet. Allah says:

O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak loud to him as you speak loud to one another, lest your deeds become null while you do not perceive. (49:2)

Likewise, there are some acts of obedience which expiate and atone some sins. Such are the obligatory prayers, *hajj* and the avoidance of great sins. Allah says:

About prayer:

And establish prayer in the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night; surely good deeds take away the evil deeds; this is reminder to the mindful. (11:114)

About *hajj*:

then whoever hastens off in two days, there is no sin on him, and whoever tarries (there), there is no sin on him. (2:203)

About avoidance of great sins:

If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins ... (4:31)

Those who avoid the great sins and the indecencies except small sins (or just passing thoughts); surely your Lord is liberal in forgiving. (53:32)

3) There are some sins which transfer the good deeds from their doer to someone else. Murder is one of those sins. Allah says:

Verily I intend that you bear my sin and (also) your sin ... (5:29)

Other such sins, according to the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams of *Ahlu 'l-bayt* are backbiting

and calumny, and others.

There are, likewise, some acts of obedience which transfer the evil deeds from the doer to someone else, as will be explained later.

4) There are some sins which transfer to the doer evil deeds similar to those committed by another person. Allah says:

That they may bear their own burdens entirely on the day of resurrection and also of the burdens of those whom they lead astray without knowledge. (16:25)

And most certainly they shall carry their own burdens, and other -burdens with their own burdens. (29:13)

In the same way, some acts of obedience transfer to the doer good deeds similar to those done by another person. Allah says:

and We write down what they have sent before and their foot prints ... (36:12)

5) Some sins cause double punishment. Allah says:

In that case We would certainly have made you to taste a double (punishment) in this life and a double (punishment) after death ... (17:75);

...the punishment shall be increased to her doubly (33:30)

On the other hand, there are some good deeds which bring double reward or even more. Allah says about spending in the way of Allah:

The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is as parable of a grain growing seven ears, in every ear there are a hundred grain; and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases. (2:261).

Also He says;

These shall be granted their reward twice (28:54);

He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you will walk, and forgive you. (57:28)

Moreover all good deeds get their rewards multiplied manifold, as Allah says:

Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it... (6:161)

6) Some good actions change the evil deeds into good ones. Allah says:

Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones ... (25:70)

7) There are some good deeds whose like is given to other than the doer (without the doer losing it or its reward). Allah says:

And (as for) those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith, We will unite with them their offspring and We will not diminish to them aught of their work ... (52:21)

The same may happen about some evil deeds. For example, if one oppresses orphans it brings the same type of oppression on his own children after his death. Allah says:

And let those fear who, should they leave behind them weakly offspring, would fear on their account ... (4:9)

8) Some good deeds transfer the evil deeds of the doer (let us call him Zayd) to another person (Bakr), and the good deeds of Bakr to Zayd. Likewise, some evil deeds transfer the good deeds of the doer, Zayd, to Bakr, and the evil deeds of Bakr to Zayd.

This is a surprising factor in reward and recompense, and we shall explain it in detail under verse 8:37:

So that Allah may separate the impure from the pure, and put the impure, some of it upon the other, and pile it up together, then cast it into hell ...

There are many traditions explaining the situations where the above-mentioned changes and exchanges may occur, and we shall quote them in the commentaries of these verses, God willing.

If we ponder on the various verses quoted above, we shall see that the system of the recompense of actions (their effectiveness in bringing about happiness and unhappiness) is entirely different from the system of their physical effect.

For example, eating is a work which by various actions and reactions affects the eater and satisfies his hunger, but that satiation is not carried on to someone else, nor is it transferred from the eater to another person.

Also, the object of the said eating is the food eaten; the eating changes the food stage by stage into various forms. But that eating cannot affect other food, nor can that food be changed or exchanged with other eaters, nor can the nature of the food be changed to something else.

In the same way, if Zayd beats 'Umar, the action is beating, not something else; the beater is Zayd, not someone else; and the beaten one is 'Umar, not another person.

But when it comes to the effectiveness of the same actions in happiness or unhappiness, the system completely changes. Allah says

... and they did not do Us any harm but they did harm their own souls ... (2:57);

... and the evil plan does not beset any save the authors of it. (35:43);

See how they lied against their own souls ... (6:24);

Then shall it be said to them: Where is that which you used to set up besides Allah? They shall say: They are gone away from us, nay, we used not to call upon anything before. Thus does Allah confound the unbelievers. (40:73—74)

In short, in the world of “recompense”, one action is sometimes changed to another, sometimes transferred to someone other than the doer, sometimes given an opposite effect. In other words, the system of recompense is quite different from physical causes and effects.

Question: In that case, there will be no place for reason in the world of actions and their effects, and the rule of wisdom will come to an end; nothing will remain in its real form.

Answer: It is not correct to say that reason and wisdom have no place in this scheme. Allah and His angels, as He has described in His Book, do offer intellectual arguments against the sinners at the time of death and in Barzakh; and they will offer the same type of proofs against them on the day of resurrection and in Paradise and Hell. Allah says:

And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon, except such as Allah please; then it shall be blown again, then Lo! they shall stand up awaiting. And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord, and the Book shall be laid down, and the prophets and the witnesses shall be brought up, and judgement shall be given between them with justice, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. And every soul shall be paid back fully what it has done, and He knows best what they do. (39:68–70).

The Qur’an repeatedly says that Allah shall decide on the day of resurrection between the people with justice in that which they differed in. For example, it narrates the argument which Satan will put forth on that day:

And Satan shall say after the affair is decided: Surely Allah promised you the promise of truth, and I gave you promises then failed to keep them to you; and I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you obeyed me; therefore do not blame me but blame yourselves: I cannot be your aider (now) nor can you be my aiders; surely I disbelieved in your associating me with Allah before; surely it is the unjust that shall have the painful punishment. (14:22)

All such verses clearly show that rational arguments and proofs are not, and shall not be, abolished in the world of recompense, although that place is entirely different from this physical world.

Question: But how, then, to reconcile the two claims: that the world of recompense has its own system

of reward and punishment, totally different from this world, and that reason also rules in that world?

Answer: The fact is that Allah has talked with people, in guiding them, in their own language, and has used the expressions of social wisdom while addressing them, and has based His speech on the principles and rules of mastership and servitude.

He calls Himself Master, the men are His slaves, the prophets are His messengers to them, He continuously maintains contact with them through commands and prohibitions, prophetic missions and admonishments, good tidings and warnings, promises and threats, and all related matters like punishment and forgiveness, and so forth.

This is the style of the Qur'an when it talks with mankind. But it has made it clear that the real affair is far above human thinking and imagination.

People cannot understand it, nor can their limited intellects comprehend it. That is why it has been brought down to the level of their mental power and clothed in a language which they can understand.

In this way, it has been made possible for them to know as much of the sublime truth as was necessary for their happiness and bliss. Allah says:

(I swear) by the book that makes manifest (the truth): surely We made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand. And surely it is in the original of the Book with Us, truly elevated, full of wisdom. (43:2—4)

It is for this reason that the Qur'an has based its description of the rules of recompense, and all related matters, on the fundamentals of social laws which are known to reasonable men and which are based on social good and evil.

It is really wonderful how those sublime realities, which are so much higher than the level of the common human intellect, can still be explained in terms of that very intellect.

For example, practical social wisdom does not reject the idea of giving a harder punishment to a wrongdoer by holding him responsible for all the social evil resulting from his misdeed.

Thus, a murderer may be held responsible for the loss of all social benefits and rights resulting from the death of the slain person. And a person starting an evil custom may be punished for the like misdeeds of his followers.

In the first example, it may be decreed that the wrongs done apparently by the slain person, were done by the murderer; and in the second example, it may be decided that the like of the misdeeds done by the followers were also done by the initiator of that misdeed, while the followers are not free from the blame in any way — thus the deeds of the followers are the deeds of the initiator as well, and both shall be punished for them.

Similarly, there are situations in which it may be decreed that the doer of an action was not its doer, or that a particular action is in reality some other action, or that the good deeds of someone else belong to this man, or that this man shall have the like of the good deeds done by the other.

The Qur'an offers reasons for all such changes and exchanges in the world of recompense and explains them in terms of the social laws found in human society, bringing these sublime realities down to the level of the human mind, although the system of that world is totally different from this physical one, and although our social laws have a limited scope and are not valid beyond this life.

It is only on the day of resurrection that those hidden realities will manifest themselves before the eyes of man. Allah says:

And certainly We have brought them a book which We have explained with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for the people who believe. Do they wait for aught but its final interpretation? On the day when its final interpretation comes about, those who neglected it before will say: Indeed the apostle of our Lord had brought the truth ... (7:52–53)

Also, He says:

And this Qur'an is not such as could be forged by those besides Allah, but is a verification of that which is before it and a clear explanation of the book ... Nay, they rejected that of which they have no comprehensive knowledge, and its final interpretation has not yet come to them ... (10:37–39)

Question: These verses, describing such a strange system of recompense, are in conflict with other verses which say that everyone will be responsible for his own action. See for example the following verses:

So, he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it. (99:78)

... and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another ... (6:164)

...every man is responsible for what he has wrought. (52:21)

And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for. (53:39)

Surely Allah does not do any injustice to men, but men do injustice to themselves. (10:44)

There are numerous such verses, and they are diametrically opposed to the earlier-mentioned verses about this system of recompense.

Answer: Not at all. The earlier mentioned verses have decreed that the misdeeds done by a man who was slain unjustly were actually done by the unjust murderer.

Now if the murderer is punished for those misdeeds, he is punished not for the deeds of the other person, but for those done by himself.

Similarly, they have decided that if a man follows another in a sinful act, that action was not done by the follower alone; it is the work of the follower as well as the leader.

Thus, there are two sins here, one of the follower, and another of the leader. And the leader will be punished, not for the sin of the follower, but for his own.

In the same way, those verses have judged that if someone aids an oppressor in his oppression or follows a leader on the wrong path, then the said helper or follower is a partner in those misdeeds; and whatever wrong is done by that oppressor or leader, the said helper or follower is its doer to the same degree.

Thus, these people and others like them are literally and completely governed by the verses quoted in the question, such as “no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another”.

Such cases are not outside the sphere of such verses; they are not in conflict with them, nor are they an exception from the rule.

The same fact is hinted at in the verse,

...and judgement shall be given between them with justice, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. And every soul shall be paid back fully what it has done, and He knows best what they do. (39:69—70)

The sentence, ***He knows best what they do*** shows, or hints at, the fact that this paying back fully what every soul has done will be done according to the knowledge of Allah, and according to His, not their, reckoning.

The sinners have no knowledge and no wisdom. Allah has deprived them of reason in this world, as He narrates the confession of the people of the Fire:

And they shall say: Had we but listened or pondered (or, understood), we would not have been among the inmates of the burning fire. (67:10).

The same will be the case in the hereafter, as Allah says:

And whoever is blind in this (world), he shall also be blind in the hereafter, and more erring from the way. (17:72);

also He says,

It is the fire kindled by Allah, which rises above the hearts. (104:6—7).

This deprivation is confirmed in the verse

... until when they have all come up with one another into it, the last of them shall say with regard to the foremost of them: Our Lord! these led us astray, therefore, give them a double chastisement of the fire. He will say: Every one shall have double but you do not know. (7:38)

This verse proves that both the leaders and the followers shall be given double punishment — the leaders, because they went astray and misled others into error; and the followers, because they went astray and kept the path of error open by walking in it. Then the verse says that they do not know.

Question: These verses, which say that the sinners are deprived of knowledge in this world as well as in the hereafter, contradict other verses which say that they do possess knowledge.

For example, Allah says:

A book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an for people who know. (41:3)

Add to it the verses which offer arguments against them: how can one argue with someone who has no knowledge and cannot understand reasoning.

Moreover, these verses themselves contain a sort of argument against them in the hereafter. All these things compel us to believe that sinners will possess knowledge and reason in the hereafter.

Apart from this, there are some verses which specifically say that they will possess knowledge and certainty in the hereafter. For example:

Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp (50:22);

And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord! Our Lord! We saw and we heard, therefore send us back, so that we may do good; surely (now) we are certain. (32:12)

Answer: When it is said that sinners have no knowledge in this world, it means that they do not act according to their knowledge. And when it is said that they shall have no knowledge in the hereafter, it means that they cannot escape from the effects of the foolish acts which they have done in this world, and that foolishness will continue to torment them in the hereafter.

For example:

And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open (17:13);

Until when he comes to Us, he says (to Satan): O would that between me and thee there were the

distance of the east and the west ... (43:38).

There are many verses which support this interpretation, and we shall explain this matter fully in the commentary of the verse 2:242:

Then Allah makes clear to you His signs so that you may understand.

Imam al-Ghazali has explained the matter of the transfer of deeds in a different way in one of his books. The gist of his discourse is as follows:

“The exchange and transfer of good and evil deeds because of injustice and sin is affected in this world as soon as that injustice and sin occurs; but it will be known (only) on the day of resurrection.

Then the oppressor will find his good deeds in the accounts of the oppressed. But that transfer had already been affected in this life. Then Allah will say on that day,

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

Thus Allah will declare in the hereafter that the kingdom belongs to Him. But that kingdom will not come to Him on that day; it is His always and will remain His forever, although this reality will not manifest itself to His creatures before the day of resurrection.

And what a man does not know is for him non-existent, even if in reality it exists; when he comes to know of it, it is as though it came into existence just then.

“Some people say that “action” is an immaterial, incorporeal thing. It is not a substance which could be transferred from one person to another in this life.

And it is equally impossible to transfer it in the hereafter; because after death the action ceases to exist, and a non-existent thing cannot be brought back to existence.

Therefore, it is difficult to see how a good or evil deed can be transferred from one person to another, either in this life or in the hereafter.

“But this objection is not correct. When we say that a good deed is transferred, we mean that its reward is transferred. Just as the acts of obedience are done to obtain their reward, so the transfer of the reward, i.e. the effect, was metaphorically mentioned as the transfer of the cause, i.e. the good deed itself.

That reward or effect is not something separate from the human soul; it is a quality ingrained in it. When the soul is brought back in the body, it will return with all its qualities, including the effects of good or evil deeds.

“When a man does a good deed, i.e. an act of obedience, a light appears in his heart. In the same way

a sin or misdeed causes darkness to appear therein.

The light of obedience connects the heart with the sublime world of divine light, knowledge and perception. On the contrary, misdeed and oppression remove the heart away from that world.

The effects of good and evil actions are opposed to each other; each tries to weaken or eradicate the other. Allah has said:

Surely good deeds take away the evil deeds. (11:114)

The Prophet has said: 'If you commit any evil deed, follow it up with a good deed, so that it may eradicate it.' Every ill or hurt removes the effects of some sins.

That is why the Prophet has said: 'Verily, man is rewarded even for a thorn which pricks his foot.' Also he said: 'The punishments are atonements.'

“When an oppressor oppresses someone, his action creates in his own heart darkness and hardness which cause the eradication of the effects of the light (that had appeared in his heart because of the previously-done good deeds).

And his victim feels pain and hurt, and thereby his lust and base feelings are weakened and it causes the obliteration from his heart of the effects of the evil deeds done previously. Darkness gives way to light.

“In this way the light which was in the heart of the oppressor is transferred to the heart of the oppressed; and the darkness in the heart of the oppressed goes to the heart of the oppressor. This is the meaning of the transfer or exchange of the good and evil deeds.

“It can be said that it is not the real transfer. What it actually means is that the light of the oppressor's heart is extinguished, and a new light is created in the heart of his victim.

And the darkness of his victim's heart is removed and a new darkness is created in the heart of the oppressor. And it is not the real interchange.

“The above observation is correct, but the use of this word is still justified. We say: 'The shadow moved from here to there', or 'The light of the sun or of the lamp moved from the floor to the wall'.

Such sentences are quite in order, as they are based on metaphor. And there is a double metaphor in our saying that good deeds are transferred from one man to another.

First, the reward of the good deed is called a good deed, using the name of the cause for its effect; then the eradication of a feature at one place and the creation of its like at other place is called the exchange or transfer of the feature.

Such figures of speech are common in every language and it could be proved by logical proofs. The evidence from the Qur'an and traditions is in addition to that.”

This was the gist of the views expressed by Imam al-Ghazali. As he himself has said, his explanation reduces this belief to a double metaphor, or a metaphor in metaphor.

If we were to extend this interpretation, then all the rules mentioned in this essay would become metaphors. We have written earlier that Allah has based the system of recompense on social practical wisdom.

And there is no doubt that reason treats these laws as a reality, not as a metaphor. Therefore, the system of recompense should also be treated as a reality, not as a metaphor.

This is true so far as this world of practical wisdom is concerned. Of course, if one were to look at the spiritual world, then this whole material world would be seen to be just a metaphor. But here the discussion is not in that context.

Now, we return to the details about deeds:

B) Actions Preserved, Written And Embodied

Deeds are preserved and written; and assume the form of a body. Allah has said:

On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good, and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration ... (3:30)

And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open. (17:13)

... and We write down what they have sent before and their footprints, and We have fully recorded everything in a clear writing. (36:12)

Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your evil, so your sight today is sharp. (50:22)

This subject has already been discussed in the first volume.

C) Relation Between Actions And “Natural” Phenomena

There is a relation between actions and happenings outside. By “actions” we do not mean here physical movements; what we mean is good and evil deeds. Allah says:

And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and (yet) He pardons most (of your faults). (42:30)

Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition; and when Allah intends evil to a people, there is no averting it. (13:11)

This is because Allah was never to change a favour which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition ... (8:53)

These verses clearly show that there is a relation between our actions and the happenings around us, whether good or bad.

This matter is concisely put in two Qur'anic verses:

And if the people of the town had believed and guarded (against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they rejected, so We overtook them for what they had earned. (7:96)

Mischief has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return. (30:41)

Obviously, natural phenomena are somehow related to human deeds. If humanity remains obedient to the commandments of Allah and walks on His chosen path, happiness and goodness follow and the doors of bliss are opened.

On the other hand if he strays from the path of obedience and continues in his error, mischief and bad faith, chaos appears in the land and on the sea, nations are destroyed because of the injustice prevalent in them, the state of law and order deteriorates, conflict and war become the norm of the day; in short, happiness becomes a scarce commodity and unhappiness reigns in the land.

Not only this, natural calamities and disasters appear, like flood, earthquakes, lightening, cyclones, etc. Allah has mentioned the deluge of the dam of Ma'arib, the flood of Nūh, the lightening of Thamūd and the gale of 'Ad as some examples of phenomenon.

When a wicked nation is submerged in depravity, vice and evil, Allah makes it taste the bad consequences of its misdeeds, and this leads to its decline, fall and destruction. Allah says:

Have they not travelled in the earth and seen how was the end of those who were before them? Mightier than these were they in strength and in fortifications in the land, but Allah destroyed them for their sins; and there was not for them any defender against Allah. (40:21)

And when We wish to destroy a town, We send our Commandment to the people of it who lead easy lives; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction. (17:16)

Then We sent Our apostles one after another; whenever there came to a people their apostles,

they called him a liar; so We made some of them follow others and We made them stories; so away with a people who do not believe. (23:44)

So this is the story of evil people. Diametrically opposed to it is the story of good and virtuous nations.

Individuals, like groups and nations, are taken over by the effects of their good and evil deeds, by calamities and misfortunes.

In addition to this, an individual is sometimes blessed with the blessings given to his forefathers, and is also sometimes overtaken by the results of his ancestors' misdeeds and oppression.

Allah quotes Ya'qūb (a.s.) as saying to Yūsuf (a.s.):

And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of sayings and make His favour complete to you and to the children of Ya'qūb as He made it complete before to your fathers, Ibrahim and Ishaq ... (12:6)

The favours mentioned in this verse refer to the kingdom, honour, etc. which Allah gave to Yūsuf.

Thus We made the earth to swallow up him and his abode... (28:81)

....and We assigned to him a lofty tongue of truthfulness. (19:50)

Probably this "lofty tongue of truthfulness" means good and righteous offspring, as Allah says in another place;

And He made it a word to continue in his posterity ... (43:28)

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man; so your Lord desired that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure ... (18:82)

And let those fear who, should they leave behind weakly offspring, would fear on their account ... (4:9)

It hints that the offspring may be overtaken by the effects of the injustice of their forefathers.

When Allah bestows a bounty on a nation (or an individual), and that nation (or individual) is righteous, then that bounty is a blessing — and at the same time it is a trial to test its (or his) faith.

Allah says about Sulayman (a.s.) that:

he said: This is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful; and whoever is grateful, he is grateful only for his own self, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely my Lord is Self-sufficient, Honoured. (27:40)

Again Allah says:

If you are grateful, I would certainly give you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe. (14:7)

These two verses prove that thank fullness to Allah is in itself a good deed which brings about the blessings of Allah.

If that blessed nation (or individual) is unrighteous and wicked then that blessing is a devise of Allah to lead it step by step to its ruin, or a respite given to it to complete the proof of Allah against it. Allah says:

... and they devise plans and Allah too arranges a plan; and Allah is the best of planners. (8:30).

We will lead them on by steps from whence they perceive not; and yet I respite them; surely My plan is firm. (68:44–45);

And certainly we tried before them the people of Pharaoh... (44:17)

And if misfortune comes to a nation (or individual), and trouble and travail plague them, and they are righteous people, then that affliction is a test and trial by which Allah separates his good servants from the evil ones.

They come out of that suffering more purified, like gold when it is melted in the fire. Allah says:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, We believe, and not be tried? And certainly We tried those before them, so Allah will certainly know those who are true and He will certainly know the liars. Or do they who work evil think that they will escape Us? Evil is it that they judge! (29:2–4);

... and We bring these days to men by turns, and that Allah may know those who believe and take witness from among you... (3:140)

And if the people undergoing hardship are wicked, then that hardship is the chastisement of their misdeeds and a sign of the wrath of Allah. Earlier-mentioned verses are enough to show this aspect.

So this is the story of actions which happen in the world and ultimately returns to their doer.

It is necessary to mention here that the following verse has no connection with the subject under discussion:

And were it not that all people would have been of one way of life, We would certainly have assigned to those who disbelieve in the Beneficent God (to make) of silver the roofs of their houses and the stairs by which they ascend, and the doors of their houses and the couches on which they recline; and (other) embellishments of gold; and all this is naught but provision of

this world's life, and the hereafter is with your Lord only for those who guard (against evil).

(43:33—35)

The purpose of this verse is to condemn this world and its paraphernalia, and to show that it has no value or importance in the eyes of Allah, and that is why He bestows it even on the disbelievers.

And had it not been misleading to the people, He would have reserved all the ease and comfort of this world for the disbelievers.

Question: Calamities, whether common to all or particular to a group or an individual, like floods, earthquakes, epidemics, wars, famines, and so on occur because of their well-known physical or natural causes.

When the causes appear, the results follow, and it makes no difference whether the nation or individual is good or wicked. Therefore, there is no reason to say that such phenomena occur because of good or evil deeds.

Such a claim is just a theory invented by religion which is not supported by facts or experience.

Answer: We will discuss this philosophical question in detail in the commentary of the verse 7:96,

And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth.

But a short reply is appended below:

This objection arises because the meaning of the discourse of the Qur'an is not understood properly. When the people of the Qur'an say that

good or bad actions bring out similar good or bad happenings in the world,

they do not mean that there are no natural or physical causes for those happenings, or that those causes have lost their effectiveness in such incidents.

Also, they do not say that those good or evil deeds are, together with natural causes, joint causes of those happenings.

For example, when we say that there is a Creator for this world, we do not mean to negate the system of cause and effect which is found in the universe, nor do we say that these causes are partners with Allah in the creation of the world.

What we say is that there is a cause over and above all other apparent causes. Likewise, when we say that good or evil actions result in good or evil incidents in the world, we do not deny the effectiveness of natural causes; we only mean that there is a higher and more powerful cause, i.e. the good or evil deeds

of human beings which serve as the motive power of the natural causes.

When a man writes, it is the pen which draws the letters on the paper; but the pen moves not on its own account but by the movement of the hand; and a man with open eyes will not stop even there — he will see the person who moves his hand.

When he says that that person writes, he does not negate the effect and force of the hand or the pen; but he knows who the real writer is.

Experience and observation have shown that creation has given every species the means to avert damage or deterioration. Why should homo sapiens alone be an exception to this rule?

Also every species is confronted by one or more opposing forces to sharpen its own defensive powers, and in this way it continues from strength to strength till it reaches its perfection.

Why should man not be provided with this means of reaching the height of his perfection?

Allah says:

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

And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain; that is the opinion of those who disbelieve ... (38:27)

If a maker makes anything without any purpose just in sport, there remains no further relation between him and the thing made; he does not care what happens to that thing.

But if he makes it for a purpose, he looks after it; if any snag appears in its proper functioning, he mends and repairs it by adding or subtracting something or by dismantling and re-assembling it.

The same is the case with the creation of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, including human beings. Allah did not create all these in vain or in sport; He created them with a purpose and they have to return to Him, as He has said:

What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? (23: 115);

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

With this background, it is exceedingly clear that God's Providence should be concerned with leading mankind to the goal of its perfection, first by calling them to come to the right path and guiding them to it; then through test and trial; and finally by destroying those about whom there is no hope at all that they may attain the goal of their creation.

It is only in this way that the creative goal of individuals and the whole of the species can be achieved; and damaged, nay, damaging parts can be discarded and thrown into perdition, giving relief and respite to the other parts. Allah 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 of you, even as he raised you up from the seed of another people. (6:133)

(Ponder upon the place and significance of the sentence,

And your Lord is the Self-sufficient One, the Lord of mercy.)

To make a long story short, this divine system of trial and retribution is, as declared by Allah, an insuperable, invincible and irresistible force which no one can control or subdue. Allah says:

And whatever affliction befalls you it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and (yet) He pardons most (of your faults). And you cannot escape in the earth, and you shall not have a guardian or a helper besides Allah. (42:30—31)

Also He says:

And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the apostles. Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones (37:171-173).

D) Actions With Reference To Happiness And Misery

Those actions causing happiness will always be victorious over those causing misery. Every good quality belongs to actions causing happiness: victory, steadfastness, stability, peace, hope, eternity, etc.

Its opposite factors, destruction, nullity, shakiness, fear, decline and defeat, belong to actions causing misery.

There are numerous Qur'anic verses declaring the above fact. See, for example, the following parable:

Have you not seen how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed and whose branches are in heaven, yielding its fruit on every moment by the permission of its Lord? And Allah sets forth parables for men that they may reflect. And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability. Allah confirms those who believe with the sure word in this world's life and in the hereafter, and Allah lets the unjust go astray, and Allah does what He pleases. (14:24—27)

Also Allah says:

That He may manifest the truth of what was true and show the falsehood of what was false, even though the guilty ones disliked (8:8); ... and the (good) end is for guarding (against evil) (20:132);

And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the apostles. Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones (37:171—173);

...and Allah is predominant over His affair, but most people do not know (12:21).

There are other similar verses.

The last words of the last-mentioned verse, ***but most people do not know***, show that this predominance and victory is not as people think, because most of them are unaware of this victory.

Had it been material victory which could be perceived by everyone, the majority would not have remained ignorant of it. This ignorance and unawareness results from two factors:

First: The thinking power of man is limited; his eyes see only those things which are near to him; he talks about the present and is unaware of what the future has in store.

His kingdom is of this day, and his predominance is of this moment. He measures the whole of existence according to the scale of his short span of life and its small possessions. But Allah is the Master of time and space and the Ruler of this world as well as the hereafter.

He has power and authority over everything. When He judges, He separates the right from the wrong; when He decrees, it is done with truth. This world and the hereafter are but one in His sight; He is not afraid that anything will escape away from His authority.

He, therefore, makes no haste in any affair. It is possible (rather, it is a fact) that He may decree a single day's disturbance to establish peace and order for a long time; or the tragedy of one individual as a means of happiness for the whole nation.

Now the ignorant man thinks that Allah was helpless and could not remove that disturbance or tragedy. (How evil is what he thinks!) But, the fact is that Allah sees the whole chain of time even as He sees a single link of it; He judges about His whole creation as He judges about a single person.

One affair does not make him oblivious of another affair; and the preservation of both does not tire Him; and He is the High, the Great. Allah says:

Let it not deceive you that those who disbelieve go to and fro in the cities (fearlessly). A brief enjoyment! Then their abode is hell, and evil is the resting place! (3:195—196)

Second: A spiritual victory is not the same as a material one. A material victory and predominance means that the victor controls the actions of the vanquished, by depriving them of their freedom of

choice, and by compelling them to do what they do not like.

It is enough to look at colonial and imperial powers: at how they gave themselves licence to kill and enslave the weaker people and how they ruled on them as it suited their whim and fancy.

But experience shows that tyranny and compulsion cannot last long; and, that therefore, a colonial authority cannot rule over its colonies forever — it is but a passing show.

A spiritual victory, on the other hand, depends on capturing hearts and minds; it trains people who believe in the cause and are ready to sacrifice themselves to make the cause succeed.

There is no grade above perfect faith, and no fortress stronger than belief. When one believes in a cause it is bound to manifest itself one day, even if, for the present, it remains hidden from the public eye.

It is for this reason that the great powers and living societies put such a great emphasis on the dissemination of their views throughout the world. Sometimes, they spend more time and energy on such propaganda than on arms and ammunition.

It is because they know that faith in a cause is more powerful than guns and tanks. If this is correct about these illusionary causes of politics, it must be far more correct about the eternal truth to which Allah invites the mankind.

Nothing stands in opposition to truth, per se, except falsehood. And what is there after truth except error and falsehood? It is known that falsehood cannot stand against truth. It is bound to fall, and truth is bound to vanquish error and falsehood.

Truth, in its effectiveness, as well as in its conveyance to the destination, is not inconsistent nor does it fail to bring about its result. If a believer overcomes an enemy of the truth, in this life, then he is the victor and also gets the good reward for it in the hereafter.

If, on the other hand, he is defeated by the enemy of the truth, and the enemy compels him to adopt things which are disliked by Allah, it is his duty to act accordingly and save his life — and Allah will be pleased with that apparently irreligious behaviour.

Allah says:

...except (when) you guard yourselves against (them) for fear from them (3:28).

And if the enemy kills him, then it will be for him an everlasting pleasant life, not death. Allah says:

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive (2:154).

In this way, the believer is never vanquished; he is always victorious — either both apparently and in reality, or only in reality. Allah refers to this aspect in the verse,

Say: Do you await for us but one of the two most excellent things ... (9:52)

The truth, therefore, is always victorious in this world.

Nature, i.e. creation, is leading the human species towards truth and felicity — it is leading it creatively — and certainly it will reach its goal.

The apparent victory of falsehood which we experience from time to time is not worthy of our attention: these are stepping stones for the truth to reach its height.

Why should we worry? ‘Time’ has yet to come to its end, the world still exists, and the system of creation is still all powerful. There is enough time for truth to overpower falsehood, this much about the victory of truth in appearance.

There is no need to explain in so many words about its victory in reality: we all know that the truth is always victorious.

Why did we say in the beginning that every good characteristic, such as permanence, stability and beauty, belongs to the true word and deed; and every evil characteristic, such as instability, infirmity, evil and ugliness, belongs to the false word and deed?

We have mentioned previously the following verses:

That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of every thing; there is no god but He; whence are you then turned away? (40:62);

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

Whatever benefit comes to you, it is from Allah, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself. (6:79)

All these verses show that wrongs and evils are “non–existence”; and as such they cannot be attributed to Allah who is the Creator, Originator and Bestower of existence.

The case of the good is just the opposite. It is, therefore, attributed to Allah. And it is because of this that good words and good deeds are the source of every beauty and elegance, and the origin of every virtue and felicity (like stability and permanence, blessing and benefit), in contrast to evil words and deeds.

Allah says:

He sends down water from the heavens, then the valleys flow according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam; and from what they melt in the fire, for the sake of

(making) ornaments or apparatus, arises a scum like it; thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood; then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which profits the people, it remains in the earth; thus does Allah set forth parables. (13:17)

E) Actions With Reference To Reason

Good words and deeds conform with the dictates of reason, in contrast with the evil words and deeds. It has already been explained that Allah has made his laws on the foundation of reason.

By reason we mean that faculty by which man perceives right and wrong, and distinguishes between good and bad.

It is for this reason that Allah commanded man to follow his reason, and forbade everything which deranges the reason or throws it into confusion, like drinking alcoholic liquids, gambling, uttering vain words, adultery, cheating, and so on.

He also forbade lying, slandering, false accusation, embezzlement, murder, and, in short, all such things which throw reason out of gear and lead it to a wrong judgement.

Human life is built on the basis of correct perception and proper thinking, in all its affairs – individual as well as social. If you analyse the personal and collective ills of humanity, you will find that they spring from actions which disturb and confuse the reason.

This subject will be explained, God willing, in another place.

Traditions

Ibn Jarir has narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas that he said: “I was riding (on a camel) behind the Messenger of Allah.

He said: ‘O Ibn ‘Abbas! Be satisfied with what Allah (*qaddara*, قَدَّرَ) has measured (decreed) for you even if it is against your wishes; because it is so written in the Book of Allah.’

I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah! And where is it, and I have read the Qur’an?’ He said: ‘and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you; and Allah knows, while you do not know.’ ” [*ad-Durru ’l-manth*۴]

The author says: This tradition implies that *taqdir* (measure, decree, التَّقْدِير) is a general word, covering both legislation and creation, and that its meaning varies according to the context.

But this tradition does not show that ‘asa (may be, عَسَى) can be used to mean obligation; it has been explained that this word is used in the Qur’an in its literal meaning, and that is “may-be”, expectation.

Therefore, the opinion expressed by a commentator that wherever the word ‘asa (عسى) has been used in the Qur’an, the “may-be” of Allah implies compulsion is not worthy of consideration.

Even more strange is the view of another that wherever “may-be” comes in the Qur’an it indicates compulsion (obligation) except in two verses, one in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*

(Maybe if he divorces you ...),

and the other in the chapter of *al-‘Isra*

(It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you...)

There is a tradition narrated by Ibn Jarir from the chain of as-Suddi: The Messenger of Allah sent a company consisting of seven of his companions, under the command of ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh al-Asadi.

The other members were: ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, Abū Hudhayfah ibn ‘Utbah ibn Rabi‘ah, Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas, ‘Utbah ibn Ghazwan as-Sulami (an ally of Bani Nawfal), Sahl ibn Baydha’, ‘Amir ibn Fuhayrah and Waqid ibn ‘Abdullah al-Yarbū‘i (an ally of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab).

The Prophet wrote a letter and gave it to ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh telling him not to read it until he camped at Malal. When ‘Abdullah camped at the valley of Malal, he opened the letter.

Written in it was: “Proceed till you camp in the valley of Nakhlah.” On reading it he told his companions: “Anyone who is ready to die let him proceed (with me) and make his will, because I am making my will and proceeding as ordered by the Messenger of Allah.”

So he went on, and only Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas and ‘Utbah ibn Ghazwan remained behind because they had lost their camel. And ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh went forward, and lo! they unexpectedly met al-Hakam ibn Kaysan, ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mughirah ibn ‘Uthman and ‘Amr al-Hadhrami.

They fought and arrested al-Hakam ibn Kaysan and ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mughirah; and al-Mughirah fled away; and ‘Amr al-Hadhrami was killed by Waqid ibn ‘Abdullah. And it was the first booty taken by the companions of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.).

When they returned to Medina with the two captives and the booty, the polytheists said: “Muhammad thinks that he follows the commands of Allah and he is the first to desecrate the sacred month.” Then Allah sent down the verse:

They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter;

is not allowed. And what you did, O polytheists! is still graver than killing in the sacred month, because you disbelieved in Allah, and hindered Muhammad from Allah’s way; and the mischief, that is polytheism, is graver before Allah than the killing.

And this is the saying of Allah,

and hindering (men) from Allah's way and denying it ... [*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*]

The author says: The traditions giving this and similar meanings are numerous from Sunni chains. And this meaning is also narrated in *Majma'u 'l-bayan*; and some traditions say that the company consisted of eight persons, the ninth being their leader.

Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim and al-Bayhaqi have narrated from the chain of Yazid ibn Rawman from 'Urwah, that he said: "The Messenger of Allah sent 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh to Nakhlah, and told him: 'Stay there until you bring to us some news about (the activities and intentions of) the Quraysh.'

And he did not order him to fight. And it was in the sacred month. And he (i.e. the Messenger of Allah) wrote for him a letter before informing him about the journey, and told him: 'Go out with your companions; when you have travelled two days, open (this) your letter and look into it and proceed to do what I have ordered you in it.

And do not force any of your companions to go with you (against his wishes)' When he travelled for two days, he opened the letter and found in it (the words): 'Proceed further until you camp at Nakhlah, and bring for us whatever information reaches you about the Quraysh.'

When he ('Abdullah ibn Jahsh) read the order, he told his companions: 'Hearing and obeying! Whoever among you desires martyrdom, should come with me, for I am proceeding on the order of the Messenger of Allah.

And whoever among you dislikes it let him go back, because the Messenger of Allah has forbidden me to compel anyone of you (against his wishes).'

The whole group proceeded with him until they reached Najran where Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and 'Utbah ibn Ghazwan lost a camel which they rode alternately.

They, therefore, remained behind to search for it; and the others went forward till they camped at Nakhlah. Then passed by them 'Amr al-Hadhrami, al-Hakam ibn Kaysan, 'Uthman and al-Mughirah ibn 'Abdullah; with them was the merchandise which they had brought from at-Ta'if: condiments and oil.

When they saw them, Waqid ibn 'Abdullah rose high to show himself to them, and he had shaved his head. When they saw him with shaved head, 'Amr said: 'No harm will befall you from him.'

And the companions of the Messenger of Allah consulted with one another about the polytheists; and it was the last day of *Jumada 'l-ukhra*. They thought: if we kill them it will be in the sacred month, and if we leave them, they will enter Mecca this night and they will be on guard.

At last, they all decided to kill them. Waqid ibn 'Abdullah at-Tamimi shot an arrow at 'Amr al-Hadhrami

and killed him. ‘Uthman ibn ‘Abdullah and al-Hakam ibn Kaysan were captured, and al-Mughirah ran away and they could not catch him.

And they took the caravan and came with it to the Messenger of Allah. He told them: ‘By God! I had not ordered you to fight in the sacred month.’ And he kept the matter of the goods and the captives in suspense and did not accept anything from it.

When the Messenger of Allah said to them what he said, they felt ashamed and thought that they had fallen into perdition; and their brethren, the Muslims, upbraided them harshly.

When the report of the incident reached the Quraysh, they said: ‘Muhammad spilled unlawful blood, and took property, and arrested men and desecrated the sacred month.’”

Then Allah sent down the verse:

They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it ...

When it was revealed, the Messenger of Allah retained the merchandise and freed the two captives on ransom. The Muslims asked: ‘O Messenger of Allah! Do you hope that it will be (counted as) a *jihad* (religious war) for us?’

Then Allah revealed the verse:

Surely those who believed and those who fled (their home) and strove hard in the way of Allah these hope for the mercy of Allah; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

And they were eight people, and the ninth was their leader, ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh.” [ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr]

The author says: There are other traditions showing that this verse: ***Surely those who believed ... Merciful***, was revealed about the group of ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh.

This verse proves that if someone performs an act of obedience, with the intention of coming nearer to Allah, but it turns out to be a mistake, not a good deed, then he is not counted as a sinner because he did it inadvertently.

Also, the last sentence of the verse, mentioning the forgiveness of Allah, shows that divine forgiveness covers even those situations where there was no sin or error.

Therefore, the use of the word “forgiveness” or its derivatives does not necessarily mean that the recipient of the divine forgiveness had committed a sin.

The traditions imply that “They ask” refers to the Muslims, not the polytheists who ridiculed the Muslims. This view is supported by the tradition of Ibn ‘Abbas mentioned under the preceding verse: “I did not see any people better than the companions of Muhammad.

They did not ask him except thirteen questions till he was taken away (from this world), all of those questions are in the Qur'an. Among them are:

They ask you about the intoxicants and games of chance; They ask you about the sacred month

...

Also, the context of the verse supports it, as the words:

and they will go on fighting with you ... ,

are addressed to the believers.

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