

(٦٣) وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

(٦٤) ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

(٦٥) وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ

(٦٦) فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

(٦٧) وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا أَتَتَّخِذُنَا هُزُوعًا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

(٦٨) قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَّا فَارِضٌ وَلَا بِكْرٌ عَوَانٌ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ فافعلوا ما تؤمرون

(٦٩) قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا لَوْنَهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَاءٌ فَاقِعٌ

لَوْنَهَا تَسْرُ النَّاطِرِينَ

(٧٠) قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ الْبَقَرَ تَشَابَهَ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ
لَمُهْتَدُونَ

(٧١) قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَّا ذُلُولٌ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلِّمَةٌ لَّا شِيَةَ
فِيهَا قَالُوا الْآنَ جِئْتَ بِالْحَقِّ فَذَبْحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

(٧٢) وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَّارَأْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

(٧٣) فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَلِكَ يُحْيِي اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَى وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

(٧٤) ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِن مِّن
الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَّا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِن مِّنْهَا لَمَّا يَشَقَّ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِن مِّنْهَا
لَمَّا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

And when We took a promise from you and lifted the mountain over you ”: “Take hold of what We have given you with firmness and bear in mind what is in it, so that you may guard (against evil)” (63).

Then you turned back after that; so were it not for the grace of Allah and His mercy on you, you would certainly have been among the losers (64).

And certainly you have known those among you who exceeded the limits of the Sabbath, so We said to them: “Be apes, despised and hated” (65).

So We made them an example to those who witnessed it and those who came after it, and an admonition to those who guard (against evil) (66).

And when Musa said to his people: “Surely Allah commands you that you should sacrifice a cow”; they said: “Do you ridicule us?” He said: “I seek the protection of Allah from being one of the ignorants” (67).

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is”. Musa said: “He says, Surely she is a cow neither advanced in age nor too young, of middle age between that (and this); do therefore what you are commanded ”(68).

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what her colour is.” Musa said: “He says, surely she is a yellow cow; her colour is intensely yellow, giving delight to the beholders” (69).

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is, for surely to us the cows are all alike, and if Allah please we shall surely be guided aright” (70).

Musa said: “He says, Surely she is a cow not made submissive that she should plough the land, nor does she irrigate the tith, sound, without a blemish in her.” The said: `Now you have brought the truth;” so they sacrificed her, though they had not the mind to do (it) (71).

And when you killed a man, then you disagreed with respect to that, and Allah was to bring forth that which you were going to hide (72).

So, We said: “Strike the (dead body) with part of the (sacrificed cow)”, thus Allah brings the dead to life, and He shows you His signs so that you may understand (73).

Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness; and surely there are some rocks from which streams burst forth, and surely there are some of them which split asunder so water issues out of them, and surely there are some of them which fall down for fear of Allah, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do (74) .

Commentary

Qur’an: And lifted the mountain over you: “at-Tur” (الطور) is mountain; that is why has been substituted by “al-jabal” (الجَبَل = mountain) in verse: **And when We wrested away the mountain over them as if it were a covering overhead (7:171). “an-Natq” (النَّتْق = to wrest away; to pull out).**

The verse at first mentions taking of a promise; and ends with the command to take hold of what they were given and to bear in mind what was in it; in between it refers to the lifting of the mountain over them, without saying why it was lifted.

But the context clearly shows that it was done to frighten them without putting them under compulsion, in order that they might obey what they were told – if Allah had wished to compel them, there was no need

to take any promise before.

Objection: If we were to take the sentence, “and lifted the mountain over you”, in its literal meaning, it would be a miraculous sign that would have forced the Israelites to obey the given command under duress and coercion; but Allah says:

There is no compulsion in the religion (2:256);

. . . will you then force men till they become believers? (10:99).

Reply: The objection is baseless. The sentence shows only that they were threatened and frightened. Just lifting the mountain over their head was not enough to coerce and force them to believe and obey. Otherwise, most of the miracles shown by Musa (a.s.) could be termed as “compulsion”! The said questioner has tried to explain away this sentence in this way:

“The Israelites were at the foot of the mountain; it was shaken violently and during that convulsion its summit loomed over them, until they thought that it was going to fall over them. It is this natural phenomenon that has been described as pulling out the mountain and lifting it over them.”

Such misinterpretations emanate from rejection of the principle of “miracle” altogether. We have already written in detail on this subject. If we were to explain away the verses of miracle in this way, no speech would remain safe from distortion; and no sentence could be taken to mean what it says; as a result, all the norms of eloquence and literature would lose their value.

Qur'an: *so that you may guard (against evil)*: “*La'alla*” (لَعَلَّ) is a particle meaning “perhaps”, “may be”; it denotes hope – the speaker may be hoping for something, or the person spoken who gives rise to the hope, or the situation justifies the hope although the speaker or the listener does not feel optimistic himself.

In any case, it implies some uncertainty about the final outcome. When this particle is used in a divine speech, it indicates hopefulness either with reference to the listener or in context of the situation; but it can never refer to the speaker, that is, Allah, because He can never be uncertain of any result. It has clearly been explained by ar-Raghib in his *al-Mufradat*. Therefore, whenever this word is used in the Qur'an, it is translated as “so that . . .”, “in order that . . .”

Qur'an: *Be apes despised*: “*Khasi'in*” (خاسئين = despised, humiliated).

Qur'an: *So We made them an example*: “*an-Nakal*” (النَّكَال) means exemplary punishment meted out to one in order that others may desist from such transgression.

Qur'an: *And when Musa said to his people: “Surely Allah commands you that you should sacrifice a cow. . .”*: This is the story of the cow of the Israelites, and it is these verses which have given this chapter its name, the Cow.

The Qur'an has used a dramatic style for this story. It opens with the middle of the story (verses 67 to 71), followed by its beginning (verse 72) and ending with its conclusion (verse 73).

Another thing to note is the changes of the pronouns – upto verse 66, the Israelites were directly addressed in second person; but verses 67 to 71 are addressed to the Prophet mentioning the Israelites in third person; then it reverts again to the original second person (verses 72 – 73).

However, let us follow the narrative in the light of the Qur'an. Allah addresses the Prophet referring to the Israelites in third person: “And when Musa said to his people: `Surely Allah commands you that you should sacrifice a cow'; they said . . .”

Obviously the order given to sacrifice a cow with subsequent description of its various characteristics and qualities, contained in these five verses (67 –71) , is like a parenthetical statement which clarifies the meaning of the next two verses (72 –73), addressed to the Israelites:

“And when you killed a man, then you disagreed with respect to that, and Allah was to bring forth that which you were going to hide. So We said: `Strike the (dead body) with part of the (sacrificed cow),' thus Allah brings the dead to life, and He shows you His signs that you may understand. ”

The five verses (67 –71) also show how ill-mannered the Israelites were; how offensive their behaviour was towards their prophet. See how off-handedly they accused their prophet of speaking idle words, how arrogantly they made demand after demand of the Lord to make His command clear and plain, as though there was any ambiguity in the divine command or the prophetic utterance.

Add to it their insulting mode of referring to God: Musa had told them, “Surely Allah commands you . . .”; but they repeatedly used the words, “Call on your Lord for our sake . . .”, as though He was not their Lord.

Then again they went on repeating the demand to be told “what she is”, “what her colour is”; and when all was explained to them, they arrogantly claimed, “Surely to us the cows are all alike”. It should be noted that they did not say that that particular cow seemed indistinct to them; they instead claimed that all the cows were alike in their eyes – implying that the cows *per se* were the same, and if a certain individual cow had some special quality, this much description was not enough for identification purpose; they did not realize that it was not the cow, but the divine will, which produced the desired result.

They were given a simple command to sacrifice “a cow ”, that is, any cow; they should have acted on that general unrestricted command, but they went on asking for more and more particulars; this was in itself a height of arrogance.

Then, look at their rudeness in asking their prophet, “Do you ridicule us?” It cast an aspersion on the prophet that he was, God forbid, an ignorant person who talked aimlessly. That is why he vehemently defended himself saying, “I seek the protection of Allah from being one of the ignorants”.

Even then, they had the temerity to say at the end of the story, “Now you have brought the truth”, implying that the previous explanations were not “the truth”, that the preceding divine speech and prophetic messages were, God forbid, untruths!

This story is not mentioned in the current Torah. Therefore, it was better not to address it to the Israelites. This may be another reason of changing the mode of address – the story was initially addressed to the Prophet, and after establishing the base, the pronouns were again changed to the original second person directly addressing the Israelites. Nevertheless, the Torah contains an order that implies that some such events must have taken place:

“If one be found slain in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him: Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain:

And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn the yoke: And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley:

And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the Lord the God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried. And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley–

And they shall answer and say: Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.” (Deut., 21:1 – 8)

It must now be clear that the story as given here is not intended as a simple narrative. The main theme is taken up in verse 72 (***And when you killed a man . . .***), but before that, a part of the story is narrated to the Prophet in some detail in verses 67 – 71 for obvious reasons.

Let us now recapitulate what has been explained above, The verses 67–71(***And when Musa said to his people: “Surely Allah commands you . . .***), addressed to the Prophet, is a prologue to the forthcoming episode (verses 72 – 73), although the listeners do not know it yet.

As the audience does not know why the Israelites were told to sacrifice a cow, its curiosity is aroused and the suspense continues until the relation between the sacrifice of the cow and detection of the murderer is revealed. It was this apparent irrelevance of the former to the latter that prompted the Israelities to accuse Musa (a.s.) of ridiculing them, of joking with them.

This accusation showed that they were completely devoid of discipline, were very arrogant and

disobedient. They were not inclined to obey any command without knowing its why and wherefore.

They were not ready to believe in that which they could not see – belief in the unseen was against their grain. They were the people who had said to Musa (a.s.):

“O Musa! we will not believe in you until we see Allah manifestly” (2:55).

Their trouble was that they wanted total independence in every affair, no matter whether it was within their domain or not. They erroneously thought that the unseen could be brought down to the level of the seen.

Consequently, they wanted to adopt a deity which they could see by their naked eyes:

They said: “O Musa! make for us a god as they have (their) gods.” He said: “Surely you are a people acting ignorantly” (7:138).

No wonder that they did not understand the sublime status of their prophet Musa (a.s.) and thought that he, like themselves, followed his own desires and joked with, and ridiculed, the people. They accused him of joking and acting like ignorant ones. And Musa (a.s.) had to refute this charge: “I seek the protection of Allah from being one of the ignorants”.

Why did Musa (a.s.) seek the protection of Allah? Why did not he say straight away that he was not an ignorant person? It was because Musa (a.s.) preferred to rely on the divine protection which cannot fail, rather than on his own virtues.

The Israelites believed that one should not accept anything without proof. This principle is correct, of course. But they were mistaken in believing that man must know the reason of every order in full detail; that a command of general nature was not enough. That is why they went on asking for more and more detail about the cow they were told to slaughter.

They thought that the cow, by its nature, could not bring a dead body to life; if somewhere there was a particular cow possessing this unheard of quality, it should be pin-pointed with accurate and detailed description. It was this trend of thought which prompted them to say: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is”.

They unnecessarily put themselves into a corner; and Allah, on this uncalled for demand, gave them a few particulars; “Musa said: `He says, Surely she is a cow neither advanced in age (i.e. not passed the calf-bearing age) nor too young (i.e. not virgin, nor one that has not given birth to a calf yet) of middle age between that (and this).” *“al- ‘Awan “(العوان) means a female in middle of child-bearing age.*

Then their Lord took mercy on them and admonished them not to indulge in too much questioning, and to be content with that which they were told: “do therefore what you are commanded”. But they did not listen to the divine advice and said: ” `Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what her

colour is.¹ Musa said:

‘He says, surely she is a yellow cow; her colour is intensely yellow, giving delight to the beholders.’¹ “This much explanation should have been enough for them, as by then the cow’s age and colour had been described to them. But no, it was not enough for the Israelites who unhesitatingly repeated their first question, shamelessly accusing Musa – and God too – of not giving them clear description as yet:

“They said: ‘Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is, for surely to us the cows are all alike, and if Allah please we shall surely be guided aright.’¹ “So, Allah further particularized her nature and characteristics, saying:

“Surely she is a cow not made submissive that she should plough land, nor does she irrigate the tith”; and then He put a further restriction about her colour, “sound, without a blemish in her.” Now that they were given all the details and could not think of any more questions, they said: “Now you have brought the truth.”

The sentence shows that they had to accept the command because they could not think of any more excuses to avoid it – but even then they put the blame of their previous disobedience on Musa – and by implication on Allah: that they had not complied with the order before because Musa (a.s.) and Allah had not explained it correctly. All this is implied in the last clause, “so they sacrificed her, though they had not the mind to do (it).”

Qur’an: *And when you killed a man* . . . : It is the beginning of the main story. “*at-Tadaru’* “ (التَدَارُءُ = translated here as “disagreed”) is derived from *ad-dar’* (الدَّرءُ = repulse) and literally means to push one another. A man was killed and every group was disowning its responsibility, putting the blame on others. But Allah was to disclose what they wanted to hide.

Qur’an: *So We said: “Strike the (dead body) with part of the (sacrificed cow)”*: The Arabic text contains two pronouns –the first (masculine) refers to the dead body and the second (feminine) to the cow. The translation omits the pronouns replacing them with the nouns they stand for.

Someone has denied the actuality of this story, suggesting that the verses simply describe the promulgation of a law (as given in the Deut., 21: 1– 8, quoted above). According to him, raising someone from the dead (mentioned in these verses) merely means finding out the identity of the killer – as Allah says:

And there is life for you in (the law of) retaliation (2: 179).

In short, he claims that there was no miracle involved, nor was there any dead body brought back to life. But the context of the story leaves no room for such misinterpretation – especially if we look at the words, “So We said: ‘Strike the (dead body) with part of the (sacrificed cow)’¹, thus Allah brings the dead to life.”

Qur'an: *Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in*

hardness: “*al-Qaswah* “ (القَسْوَة = sternness) in heart is like “hardness” in rock. “*Aw*” (أَوْ = or) is used here in the meaning of *bal* (بَلْ = rather).

The next sentences show why their hearts were worse than rocks in hardness: “and surely there are some rocks from which streams burst forth”. The sentence offers a contrast between rocks and water. Rocks are used as examples of hardness, while water is proverbially used to denote softness.

Even then, there are some rocks – with all their hardness – from which streams of water – with all its softness – burst forth; “and surely there are some of them which split asunder so water issues out of them”: The hard rocks send forth the soft waters; but the Israelites' hearts were so hard as never to allow any truth to issue out of them.

Qur'an: *and surely there are some of them which fall down for fear of Allah:* We see how the rocks and stones fall down – big rocks on the summits of mountains crack up, and then an ordinary earthquake is enough to dislodge them causing an avalanche.

Also, the cracks fill up with ice and snow during winter, then the warmth of spring melts the ice sending the streams down the valleys. This phenomenon is related to its natural causes, yet Allah says that the rocks fall down from fear of Allah.

Why? Because all the natural causes ultimately return to the First Cause, that is, Allah. Rocks, when they fall down because of the natural causes, are in fact obeying the divine decree which put them under the influence of those secondary causes.

It may, therefore, be said that they understand the command of their Lord – an understanding that is created nature. They obey the decree of Allah inasmuch as they are thus moulded by Him. Allah says:

and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification (17:44);

all are obedient to Him (2:116).

Fear too is based on perception, as are the glorifying and the obeying. It may therefore be said that the rocks fall down for fear of Allah. This sentence is of the same genre as the following ones:

And the thunder declares His glory with His praise, and the angels too for awe of Him (13:13);

And whoever is in the heavens and the earth makes obeisance to Allah only, willingly and unwillingly, and their shadows too at morn and eve (13:15).

Here the sound of thunder has been counted as the declaration of divine glory and the shadow is said to prostrate for Allah. There are many verses of the same style and all are based on the same analysis as

mentioned above.

However, the sentence, “and surely there are some of them which fall down for fear of Allah”, further shows how the Jews' hearts were worse than rocks in hardness: The rocks are afraid of Allah and do fall down for His fear, but there is no fear of Allah in the Jews' hearts, they are not afraid of divine wrath.

Tradition

As –Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about the words of Allah: **Take hold of what We have given you with firmness**, whether it meant the strength of the bodies or the firm resolution of the heart. He (a. s.) said: “Both together”¹

The author says: This tradition has also been narrated by al-`Ayyash² in his *at-Tafsir*.

Al-Halabi narrates in explanation of the words of Allah; **and bear in mind what is in it**, that he said: “Bear in mind what is in it and also bear in mind the chastisement that is laid down for its negligence.”²

The author says: It has been inferred from the position of this clause – it follows the threat implied in lifting the mountain over them.

Abu Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: “If the children of Israel had not said: **and if Allah please we shall surely be guided aright**, they would have never been given (respite).

And had they (in the beginning) taken any cow and slaughtered her; it would have been enough for them; but they went on pressing (for more and more particulars), so Allah made it harder (and harder) for them.”³

Ibn Faddal said: “I heard Abu '1-Hasan (a.s.) saying: `Surely Allah ordered the children of Israel to slaughter a cow – and what they needed was its tail. (But they asked for more and more details) so Allah made it harder (and harder) for them.’”⁴

al-Bazant⁵ said: “I heard ar-Rida (a.s.) saying: `A man from the children of Israel killed one of his relatives, then he took the body and put it in the path (leading) to the best of the Israelities' clans. Thereafter he came demanding (the revenge of) his blood.

Musa (a.s.) was informed that such and such a clan had killed such and such a man, and he was asked to tell them who the killer was. Musa said: “Bring me a cow.” They said: “*Do you ridicule us?*”

He said: “**I seek the protection of Allah from being one of the ignorants.** ” And had they taken any cow, it would have been enough for them, but they pressed (for more particulars); therefore Allah made it harder for them.

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is” : Musa said: “He

says, Surely she is a cow neither advanced in age nor too young, of middle age between that (and this)”.

Even then, if they had taken any cow (fitting this description) it would have been enough. But they pressed for more, so Allah made it harder for them.

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what her colour is” . Musa said: “He says, Surely she is a yellow cow; her colour is intensely yellow, giving delight to the beholders”.

Even then if they had taken any such cow, it would have been enough for them. But they persisted (in asking for more details) and Allah made it even harder for them.

They said: “Call on your Lord for our sake to make it plain to us what she is, for surely to us the cows are all alike, and if Allah please we shall surely be guided aright”. He said: “He says, Surely she is a cow not made submissive that she should plough the land, nor does she irrigate the tilth, sound, without a blemish in her.” They said: `Now you have brought the truth”.

They began their search and found such a cow with an Israelite youth. He said: “I shall not sell it but for a hide full of gold.” Thereupon they came to Musa and informed him. He told them to buy it. So they bought and brought it.

And Musa ordered it to be slaughtered. Then he ordered them to strike the dead body with its tail. As soon as they did so, the murdered man rose from the dead, and said: “O messenger of Allah! Surely it is my cousin who had killed me, and not the man against whom he has lodged his claim.”

In this way, they knew who the killer was. Thereafter, a companion of the messenger of Allah, Musa, said to him: “There is a story behind this cow”. He asked: “And what is it?” He said: ”(That) Israelite youth was very devoted to his father.

And he purchased some goods, and came to his father (who was asleep) and keys were under his head. And he did not like to awaken his father, and cancelled the deal. When his father woke up, he told him about it. The father said to him:

‘Well done! Take this cow; it is a recompense for what you have lost.’ ” The messenger of Allah, Musa, said to him: “Look at the faithfulness and good deed, where does it take its people to?” ”

The author says: The Tradition perfectly fit the description which we inferred from the verses.

A Philosophical Discourse About Making The Dead Bodies Alive

And About Metamorphosis

This chapter describes several miraculous signs in the stories of the Israelites and the others – for example, parting the sea and drowning the followers of Pharaoh (***And when We parted the sea for you, so We saved you and drowned the followers of Pharaoh . . .***); giving death to the Israelites by thunder-bolt and then raising them again from dead (***And when you said: “O Musa! we will not believe in you. . . ”***).

Making the clouds to give shade over them and sending for them manna and quails (***And We made the clouds to give shade over you . . .***); making the streams to gush out from the rock (***And when Musa prayed for drink. . .***); lifting the mountain over them (***. . . and lifted the mountains over you . . .***); transforming some of them into apes (***. . . so We said to them: “Be apes. . . ”***) and bringing a dead body back to life by hitting it with a part of a slaughtered cow (***So We said: “Strike the [dead body] with part of the [sacrificed cow . . .]”***).

Among the non-Israelites, there are many stories of dead men and / or animals brought back to life – for example, a large group that had fled their homes for fear of death (***Did you not see those who went forth from their homes. . .***); a chosen servant of Allah who passed by a ruined town (***Or like him who passed by a town and it had fallen down upon its roofs. . .***) and the birds which were raised from dead through the agency of Ibrahim (***And when Ibrahim said: “My Lord! show me how Thou givest life to the dead . . .***).

Altogether, there are twelve miracles, most of them occurring among the Israelites. The Qur'an has narrated them; and we have already shown that miracles do occur, and super-natural events do take place. We have also shown that such happenings are not in conflict with the system of the cause and effect.

It was clearly proved that it is not justified to interpret the verses of miracle in such a way as to deny their apparent meanings. Of course, the miracle is not related to an inherently impossible proposition, like dividing three in two equal wholes, or birth of a child that would be his own father.

But if something is possible in itself and the Qur'an says that it did happen, one should not try to explain it away as an allegory or a metaphor.

However, some miracles, like raising someone from dead and transformation, that is, metamorphosis, require a somewhat detailed study because they are sometimes criticized from philosophical point of view.

Objection: It is an accepted fact that if an existent thing, a being, having a potentiality of perfection, converts it into actuality, then it is impossible for it to retrace its steps and turn that actuality back into the same potentiality. Likewise, a more perfect being does not change, in its forward march, to a less perfect

one.

When a man dies, his soul is released from the fetters of matter; he becomes an immaterial “idea” or a spiritual being. Both these stages are above the matter; the existence in these planes is much stronger than that in the material sphere.

Therefore, it is impossible for a soul – once death has separated it from the body – to re-establish its connection with that material body. Otherwise, it would mean that a thing, having converted its potentiality into actuality, again retrogressed to the same potentiality – and as we have explained above it is not possible.

Also, man is on a higher level of existence than that of the animals. Therefore, it would be impossible for a man to change, by metamorphosis, into an animal.

Reply: Accepted that once a potentiality is turned into reality it cannot be regressed to the self-same potentiality. But raising someone from dead in this world, as well as metamorphosis, is outside the domain of this law.

Perception and reason show that a vegetable substance, when consumed by an animal, proceeds to its ultimate perfection, that is, animality, and takes the animal form. This form in itself is an incorporeal and immaterial thing. Having reached this stage, the vegetable has turned its potentiality into actuality. Now it cannot turn back to vegetable kingdom.

The animality is the fountain-head of the animal's conscious actions and perceptions. When it performs a deed an impression is outlined on its psyche. When it indulges in the same activity over and over again, that impression gets deeper and deeper until it becomes an ineradicable trait.

This new trait may become the building block of an animal species with pronounced characteristics; for example, the fox with its cunning, the pig with its lascivious lust, the panther with its predatory stalking.

If, on the other hand, it fails to acquire any characteristics, the psyche remains at its original level of simple animality. It is like the case of a vegetable which fails to reach the threshold of animality and remains at the original level of vegetable-kingdom.

Likewise, an animal, becoming a part of a human being, progresses forward on the path of humanity. A human being has the capacity of perceiving his self in absolute incorporeal terms. When it thus changes its potentiality to this actuality, it is impossible for it to go back to the self-same potentiality.

The humanity too, by repeatedly doing a certain type of deed, acquires especial traits and characteristics – and it creates various kinds of human beings with their particular properties in the same way as happens in animal kingdom.

Now, let us suppose that a dead man was returned to life in this world, and his soul re-established its

relation to the matter, that is, the body. Obviously, it would not affect the incorporeality of the soul – it was incorporeal in the first life, remained so after that connection was severed, and would remain in this second life too.

Body is the tool by which the soul carries on its material and intellectual activities, just as an artisan makes articles with the help of his tools and equipments. When the man died, the soul lost that tool; when he was revived the soul regained the possession and control of that tool.

Now, it may use that tool to acquire new talents, to attain to a higher level of perfection than before. It cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be said to be a retrogression or a retreat from perfection to imperfection, nor is it a change from reality to potentiality.

Objection: The scenario given above entails perpetual compulsion, which is obviously a false and void proposition. An incorporeal and immaterial soul, separated by death from the body, does not have any more potentials of acquiring further perfection through re-establishment of its relation to the body.

Remember that only a negligible number of people are claimed to have risen from the dead. And the multitude of human beings remain unrevived. If it were in their nature to acquire new perfections through re-establishing their link with their bodies and –yet they were denied that opportunity, they would be perpetually deprived of what their nature demanded. And this perpetual deprivation is nothing but perpetual compulsion.

Reply: There is no compulsion involved here at all. The soul has already progressed from its potentiality to the actuality. It reached a certain level and died. Now, at present it does not have any more potentiality. It will continue to possess the actuality it has already acquired.

Let us suppose that there is a man who did some good and some bad deeds, and then died. Had he remained alive he could have added to his deeds and acquired a somewhat different spiritual form, either lovelier or uglier than before.

Likewise, if he is returned to life, he may acquire better or worse traits than before. But if he is not revived, then he already owns his actuality, and will accordingly be rewarded or punished in al-Barzakh, until he acquires a spiritual form according to his earned qualities.

Even then, if he is returned to this world, he would get new potentiality for spiritual perfection, and may acquire another spiritual form by using the material tool, for example, his body. But, if he is not returned, there is neither any potentiality nor any question of compulsion, perpetual or otherwise.

We should not forget that mere deprivation of a possible perfection is not a compulsion. Otherwise, every happening in this world could be called a perpetual compulsion. Every event, every development here affects each and every thing of the universe, directly or indirectly.

There is a never-ending struggle and conflict going on in the universe; and it affects the whole system –

including the ability of a man to fully attain to his perfection. That effect may be beneficial or harmful. But nobody claims that because he was prevented, by the circumstances beyond his control, from obtaining a possible benefit, he was under perpetual compulsion.

If a talent for a certain perfection is ingrained in someone's nature and then he is prevented from achieving it, either by some factors in his own nature or some external forces bent on nullifying that talent, then only it may be called a perpetual compulsion – because in this case, putting that talent or potentiality in that species be a vain thing, an aimless venture.

Now we come to metamorphosis. If a man's figure is transformed to that of a pig or an ape, it is just an external change. He is still a man in the form of an animal; not that his humanity was erased and replaced by the nature of pig or ape.

We have already described that when one repeatedly carries on an activity, its impression is etched on one's psyche. When a man repeatedly indulges in debauchery, his psyche turns into that of a pig; and it is not impossible for that figure to appear in his facial features in this world too – as it would certainly appear in the next world. Such a man is still a man, albeit a transformed one; not that he has lost his humanity.

By the way, we sometimes read, in the newspapers and magazines, reports of academic conferences in Europe and America that tend to prove that it is possible to revive a man after his death, and that a man's facial figures may change to something else. Of course, we do not base over belief on such news and reports; nevertheless, we expect our adversaries not to forget today what they had read yesterday.

Poser: Then there is no difficulty in believing in transmigration of the souls.

Reply: There is a world of difference between metamorphosis and transmigration of the souls. In metamorphosis the same body changes its figure to look like something else; while the believers in transmigration of the souls say that a soul, after attaining its perfection and leaving the body, establishes a new connection with a new body.

Obviously, it is an impossible proposition. A question may be asked whether or not the new body was already connected to a soul of its own. If it already belonged to another soul, it would entail domination of one body by two souls, which is impossible – two persons cannot have one body, nor can one body be governed by two personalities.

If, on the other hand, the body did not have a soul already, it would mean that an accomplished and developed soul was burdened by an unaccomplished and undeveloped body. It would certainly be a regression from actuality to potentiality – just like returning a wise old man to his infancy! And this too is impossible.

Also, it should be apparent from what we have explained that it is certainly impossible for a human soul,

after leaving its human body, to be incarnated in a vegetable or animal body. In short, the belief in transmigration of the souls entails impossibility after impossibility.

An Academic And Ethical Discourse On Unquestioning Adoption Of Concepts And Rulings

The nation, most frequently described in the Qur'an, is that of the Israelites; and the prophet most numerous referred to therein is their prophet, Musa (a.s.), son of `Imran. His name has been mentioned in one hundred and thirty six places, twice as many as the second most numerous mentioned name, that is, of Ibrah m (a.s.), who has been named sixty-nine times only – as some people have calculated.⁵

It is not difficult to understand the reason for these frequent references. Islam, the true religion, is based on the belief of monotheism; its present foundation was laid by Ibrah m (a.s.) ; and Allah completed and perfected it for His Prophet, Muhammad (s.a.w.a.), as He says:

. . . *the faith of your father Ibrah m; He named you Muslims before and in this . . . (22:78) .*

And the Israelites were the most disputatious and most querrelsome of all the nations; they were the most obstinate and most abstruse of all when there was a question of submitting to the truth.

And the heathens of Arabia, whom the Prophet of Islam had to contend with, were of the same mould, so much so that Allah said to His Prophet:

Surely those who disbelieve alike is to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe (2:6).

Every vice, every depravity found in the Israelites could be found in them; they, in their hard-heartedness and impertinence were the mirror-image of the Israelites.

Ponder over the stories of the Israelites, as narrated in the Qur'an; look at the picture of their characters and morals as it emerges from those narratives. You will find a nation deeply submerged in sensualism and materialism.

They did not believe in what was beyond the reach of their external senses; for them spiritual happiness was a word without meaning; their only ambition was the pursuit of sensual pleasure; their eyes could not focus on intellectual progress or spiritual perfection, so their only aim in life was the material development.

And to this day, they have not changed a whit. It was this tendency which made their mind and will totally subservient to the matter and the material phenomena. They did not understand except that which they could see, hear, touch, taste or smell; they did not strive but for some tangible and material goals.

Their servitude to the sensual phenomena prevented them from accepting any thing outside the domain of the five senses – even if it was truth; their thralldom to matter encouraged them to accept every thing told by their materially advanced big bosses – even if it was false. It created a clear contrariety and inconsistency in their words and deeds.

They condemned every adoption of others' concepts, ridiculing it as blind following, if that concept was unperceivable by the external senses – no matter how correct it was. And at the same time, they appreciated every adoption of others' concepts, labeling it as the pleasure of life, if it conformed with their material base desires – no matter how wrong that concept was.

This trait became deeply rooted in their psyche during their long sojourn in Egypt, where the Egyptians humiliated them, enslaved them and castigated them; they subjected them to severe torment, killed their sons sparing their daughters, and in this was a great trial for them from their Lord.

However, it was this deep-rooted trait which made them heedless to what their prophets and divine scholars told them about what was good for them in this life as well as in the hereafter. (Remember their disputations with Musa and others!) And these very people were ever ready to accept and follow what their big bosses called them to, for gratification of their worldly desires.

Today the truth and reality has been afflicted by this very tragedy. The modern civilization, presented to the humanity by the western world, is likewise based on sensual perception and material outlook.

It is not prepared to accept any proof for something which is not perceivable by the external senses; and does not ask for any proof of validity, if a thing gives material and sensual pleasure.

This has resulted in weakening of the hold of human instincts, and in disappearance of deep knowledge and high morals from our society. This trait has exposed the edifice of humanity to ruin, and is confronting the society with chaos and disorder. And you will surely see its real face in a not too distant future.

Actually, not every proof is asked for, nor every unquestioning adoption of others' ideas and concepts is objectionable. Man proceeds on the road of perfection through his intentional activities. His actions emanate from his will, and the will springs from thought and notion.

Thinking, therefore, is the foundation of his perfection. Man depends on practical or intellectual cognition to which his perfection is directly or indirectly related. This cognition creates in his mind the need for individual or collective actions; this knowledge leads to intention and will which produces the desired activity.

Man, by his instinct, tries to find out the cause of every event, happening inside or outside his self. He does not do any action without knowing its reason; he does not accept any theory without ascertaining its proof.

It is his unfailing trait; he always looks for the cause of the events and actions; it is his nature and the nature never deviates from its set course. But this trait puts an unbearable burden on him. No individual can accomplish all the academic and practical processes required for his material and spiritual well-being.

It is this burden which led the man to establish a society and cooperate with other human beings. Various people were given responsibilities to perform various tasks, in order that the society, taken as a whole, might collectively accomplish all tasks, and fulfill all the needs of all its members put together.

Human needs are expanding by leaps and bounds; various branches of knowledge – sciences, technologies, arts etc. – are growing larger and larger, to such an extent that every subject has grown into hundreds of subjects – each requiring its own specialists.

Look for example, at medical science. In old days it was a branch of physics; now it has branched out into hundreds of independent subjects, and no single physician or surgeon may gain expertise in more than one or two of them.

This vast multitude of special fields has instinctively led man to limit his inquiry for cause, and his search for proof, to only those branches of knowledge in which he has gained some expertise; and accept and follow the verdicts of other specialists in other fields.

A sane person invariably always relies on the experts in the fields of their expertise. The confidence in their expertise creates a certainty that what has been said or done is correct; and this serves as the proof demanded by human nature.

The nature dictates that man should try his best to find out the detailed proof of the rightness of his idea and action in the fields of his specialty; and as a corollary it directs that he should unquestioningly accept the concepts and verdicts of others in other fields.

In short, an ignorant man should follow the decree of a learned one. It is impossible for one man to be an expert in all the branches of knowledge, or independent in all the activities necessary for his life and well-being. Therefore, it is impossible for any man to be free from blindly following a lot of experts in numerous avenues of life. Anyone claiming contrary to this, is a fool.

Of course, it is a shame if a man remains content with unquestioning following, even where he can form an independent opinion based on detailed knowledge; as it is a shame if he forms independent opinion without acquiring necessary knowledge. Both trends are undesirable, both are ruinous to a healthy civilization, both are dangerous to the society.

It is the prerogative of Allah that His decrees and orders be followed without any questioning, without any if or but; because He is the First and Final cause, and no other cause or reason is needed when He has spoken.

1. al -Mahdsin
2. al-`Ayyash
3. ad-Durru 'l-manth
4. at-Tafsir, al-Qummi
5. Vide al-Muyamu '1-mufahris, by Muhammad Fu'ad `Abdu'1-Baqi.

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