

Tahrif and the Book Itself

Considering the foregoing, the fact is that *Tahrif*, in the sense which has been a subject of disputation and contradictory opinions, has never occurred in the Qur'an. Here we give proofs from the Qur'an itself:

First, Allah says in the Qur'an:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

"Surely, We have sent down the reminder, and We will most surely be its guardian". (Qur'an, 15:9)

This *ayah* adequately proves that the Qur'an has been guarded from all tampering, and that the profane hands shall have no wily access to it.

Some have tried to interpret this *ayah* differently, stating that (reminder) represents the Prophet ('s) as mentioned in the following verse:

اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا رَسُولًا يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ

"Allah has indeed revealed to you a reminder: An Apostle who recites to you the clear communications." (Qur'an, 65: 10-11)

But this interpretation has many faults. The word "ذِكْرًا" has been used in the context of ((تنزيل-انزال)) "sending down", and therefore, it befittingly applies to the Qur'an. Had it been for the Prophet, the appropriate word would have been ((الارسال)) (sending our or sending away) or something synonymous. And if we were to accept that represents the Prophet ('s) in the second *ayah*, it certainly does not in the first *ayah* wherein Allah guarantees the protection, because it preceded by the following *ayah*:

وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ

**"And they say: O you to whom the reminder has been sent down! You are most surely insane".
(Qur'an, 15:6)**

This *ayah* undoubtedly refers to the Qur'an as **الذكر** and it becomes easy to deduce that **الذكر** occurring in the subsequent *ayah* has the same meaning.

Other interpreters have said that the preservation and protection promised by Allah refers to guarding the Qur'an against vilifications and protecting it from any repudiation of its teachings. This interpretation is also far-fetched, because if it was meant to be protected from vilification by the disbelievers, then the Qur'an has had enough of it from the enemies of Islam. And if it is held to mean that the teachings of the Qur'an are above any vilifications because of their majesty, sublimity and the inherent strength in the arguments, then this is true, but this kind of protection does not become necessary **after** the revelation. The inspiring quality of the Qur'an is self-protecting, needing no further protection. The *ayah*, as you will observe, tells about protection **after** the revelation.

There is a third interpretation advanced by some which maintains that the guardianship promised in the *ayah* is related to the whole of the Qur'an as an entity, and does not apply to its individual verses and chapters. According to them, the Qur'an in its complete form is safe with the Twelfth Imam ('a) who is in concealment, and thus the promise has been fulfilled.

This interpretation is the most defective, because the Qur'an has to remain guarded for the benefit of the people, for whom it was revealed. To say that it is safe in the possession of the twelfth Imam ('a), the way it was fully entrenched in *lawhe mahfuz* or in the possession of an angel, is just like someone saying: "I am sending you a gift and I shall keep it in safe custody, or in the custody of my chosen one".

The suggestion that the guardianship is related to the Qur'an as a whole emanates from the presumption that the Qur'an is what exists among us in a book form, or what is on our tongues as a spoken word. This is not so, because a book or a word may not exist for ever. Actually, the Qur'an, or **الذكر** mentioned in the *ayah*, is that which was revealed to the Prophet ('s), and guarding it means warding off all possibilities of distortions, interpolations and tampering, and protecting it from being lost so as to ensure that people have access to it in full. When we say that a particular eulogy or poem is guarded, we mean the original has been preserved, and protected from being lost.

Yes, there is another doubt which could creep into the minds of those who insist on *Tahrif*. They would say that it is unfair to base an argument against *Tahrif* on this *ayah* because it is quite possible that the *ayah* itself might have been tampered with. So, in order to be able to rely on this *ayah* as a basis of our argument, we have to revert to proving that there has been no *Tahrif* in the Qur'an. Thus a vicious circle is formed.

This doubt is the result of alienating the *Ahl ul-Bayt* ('a) from divine authority. Those who do not consider them an authority should find this argument irrefutable. As for those who believe that they are the authority divinely appointed, and that they are the rightful companions of the Book with whom we

must acquiesce, for them there is no room for such a doubt. The fact that *Ahl ul-Bayt* ('a) based all their deductions and conclusions on the Qur'an, and instructed their companions implicitly as well as explicitly to accept it, amply demonstrates that this Qur'an is an authority, even if it is claimed that *Tahrif* had occurred. Ultimately, the evidence from the Qur'an, against any interpolation having occurred, is based on their attestation.

The second proof from the Qur'an is:

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِّنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

".... and most surely, it is a mighty book. Falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it; a revelation from the Wise, the praised One". (Qur'an, 41:41-42)

This verse clearly indicates that the Book is free from all sorts of falsehood, and when this type of general negation occurs, it denotes totality. No doubt, *Tahrif* is a kind of falsehood and therefore it cannot find its way to the holy Book.

This submission has been opposed by some who maintain that the prevention of falsehood means the absence of any contradiction in its laws, and that its message is far from being untrue. They seek support from Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi who has quoted this tradition in his *Tafsir* from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir ('a):

"No falsehood can be imputed to it from Torah, nor from injil or zabur; and nor from behind it, which means no book will ever come to render it false".

And they also quote another tradition from both Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq ('a), recorded in *Majma ul Bayan*, which says:

"There is no falsehood in what it has reported of the past, nor in what it has conveyed of the future".

In reply I submit that these traditions do not in anyway confine the meaning of the word 'falsehood' to any single interpretation, nor do they forbid us from accepting its general connotation. In the foregoing chapter on "The excellence of the Qur'an", I have cited many reports which indicate that the meanings of the Qur'an are not restricted. This *ayah* exempts the Qur'an from all falsehood at all times, and since interpolations and tampering are a type of falsehood, they are also precluded. A further evidence is provided by the *ayah* itself when it describes the Qur'an as a Mighty Book. The 'mighty' is contained in its ability to fortify itself against all loss or changes. To restrict the meaning of falsehood to contradictions or falsehood within the book would not fully justify the use of the word **al-'izza**.

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