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6. Scientific Discourses

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

STUDENT. God has made the Noble Qur'an graspable by everyone:

And truly We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there anyone that remembreth? (***54:17, 22, 32, 40***)

But then why is it that some verses of the Qur'an are utterly complex and intricate, such that it is so difficult to reach their real meaning and message? For example, consider the noble verse,

He directeth the command from the heaven to the earth, then it ascendeth toward Him in a day that is a thousand years of your measurement. (***32:5***)

Reaching the real meaning of this verse and having a proper grasp of it is very hard. What is the process of descension of command from the Realm of Command (*'alam al-amr*) to the Realm of Creation (*'alam al-khalq*)? And what does it mean that it takes a thousand years of our common years for the command to ascend back? Without deep contemplation, only a simple interpretation and a straightforward literal meaning of the verse would be understandable to everyone.

Or for example, there are some terms in the Noble Qur'an whose definitions require exegesis and commentary.

One cannot know the meaning of these terms without referring to a commentary. For instance:

By those that pluck out vehemently * By those that gently draw out with comfort * By those that float swiftly * And those that hasten surpassingly * And those that direct the command. (***79:1-5***)[1]

Do all people understand these verses? Or should they inquire into them and refer to books of exegesis in order to realise that they mean particular groups of angels?

Another example is the term *falaq* (disjunction) in the following verse:

***Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of falaq.* (*113:1*)**

According to some exegetes, *falaq* either means 'the daybreak and morning that opens up', or 'being (*wujud*) that emerges out of non-being'.[2] But how can one know these meanings without referring to the exegeses?

Or for example, concerning the term *wayl* (literally 'woe') in Chapter 83 (al-Mutaffifin), there is a narration that

Wayl is a well in hell.[3]

Is this a matter of naming – that different locations in the Hereafter have different names, like in this world? Or is it a symbolic interpretation?

The Qur'an is easy to understand; the difficulties and complexities relate to its hidden meanings

'ALLAMAH. In terms of the meaning that initially comes to the reader's mind, it seems that all of the Noble Qur'an has been set forth very simply, such that it is understandable by everyone. Nevertheless, there are other planes and layers of meaning beyond the initial meaning that gradually become harder and more difficult to understand. Those are the inward and hidden (*batini*) meanings of the Qur'an.

The apparent (*zahir*) meaning of every verse of the Qur'an is plain, simple, and intelligible. But the hidden meanings become more and more complex. As they become deeper, they become more difficult and more distant from the understanding of common people:

Truly the Qur'an has an inside, and its inside has an inside, up to seven insides [or up to seventy insides].[4]

The 'insides' refer to the different planes of the Qur'an's meaning. Each plane involves a particular reality that is not found in the other planes. Such are the various planes of the Qur'an. So it is not that the Qur'an can be looked at from a single plane, which would be either very easy and straightforward, or difficult and unintelligible.

As with Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at), once we attach those verses to the other verses of the Qur'an, it becomes evident that they refer to the angels. 'Those that direct the command' should imply the angels, because Allah, Exalted is He, would consign the direction and execution of the affairs of the universe only to one who is qualified. It is the angels who should deal with these matters and take the affairs under their own watch and protection. These verses are very similar to the verses at the beginning of Chapters 77 (al-Mursalat) and 37 (al-Saffat) and some other parts of the Noble Qur'an, whereby the angels are ordered to carry out their assignments in different ways.

And the initial meaning of the term *falaq* in the verse, ***'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the falaq'*** (***113:1***) is the splitting and opening of the morning. Then there is this general meaning that comes to mind, and that is the splitting and emergence of *any* being from non-being. So if its definition requires an interpretation even at the first plane, it would be an interpretation that clarifies the meaning of the verse by simpler terms. An initial interpretation is not one that that unravels a complexity or introduces a [deeper] reality.

And as with *wayl*, it has been defined as misfortune, woe, disaster and fatality. And its meaning as a well [in hell] is a symbolic meaning (*tamthil*), intended to represent the idea conveyed in the adjacent verses. Otherwise it is not a specific exegesis for the term [and does not represent a hidden meaning of the verse].

The creation of the angels and the Holy Spirit

STUDENT. What does *ruh* ('Spirit') mean in the Noble Qur'an? For example it appears in the verse,

The angels and the Spirit (***ruh***) ***descend on that Night*** [***of Determination*** (***qadr***)] ***by the permission of their Lord for every command.*** (***97:5***)

And what is meant by *Ruh al-Qudus* ('Holy Spirit') and *al-Ruh al-Amin* ('Trustworthy Spirit')? Is there any connection between the Spirit (*ruh*) as used in the Qur'an and the human spirit? And why are the angels mentioned alongside the *ruh*?

'ALLAMAH. *Ruh al-Qudus* (the Holy Spirit) and *al-Ruh al-Amin* (the Trustworthy Spirit) refer to Gabriel (Jabra'il):

Say: the Holy Spirit (***Ruh al-Qudus***) ***hath delivered it from thy Lord....*** (***16:102***)

The Trustworthy Spirit (***al-Ruh al-Amin***) ***hath came down with it*** [***the Qur'an***] * ***Upon thy heart.*** (***26:193- 4***)

And the *ruh* is apparently creature that is superior to all angels, including Gabriel and Michael.

On the day when the Spirit (***ruh***) ***and the angels stand in ranks; they speak not save whoever is permitted by the All-Merciful and speaketh aright.*** (***78:38***)

The above verse mentions the *ruh* in addition to the angels. Thus the *ruh* cannot be Gabriel, for Gabriel is one of the angels.

The *ruh* is a transcendent being who stands at a superior existential plane compared to the angels. The angels are supported by the *ruh*, and get help from the *ruh* in the tasks that they carry out.

There are two verses in the Noble Qur'an that indicate that God sends the *ruh* to His prophets and

messengers who call the people toward Him, and that the angels also descend with the *ruh*:

He descendeth the angels with the Spirit* (*ruh*) *of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants, that they warn* [*people*] *that there is no deity save Me, so keep your duty unto me. (***16:2***)

…He casteth the Spirit* (*ruh*) *of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants, that he warneth* [*people*] *of the Day of Encounter. (***40:15***)

In his descents, his direction and planning of the world and in whatever he carries out, Gabriel gets help from the *ruh*. It is as if the *ruh* is with Gabriel and helps him through.

And the wording of the second verse is quite remarkable. It says that Allah 'casts' and 'throws' (*ilqa'*) the *ruh* on any of His servants that He sees qualified for warning and cautioning about the Day of Resurrection, which is the Day of Encounter.

In short, the *ruh* is a superior being and a sublime reality that comes down with the angels when they descend to execute the affairs of the world, and aids the angels in their missions. So Gabriel is different from the *ruh*, and its relation to the *ruh* is not that of a person to its species or a species to its genus. The *Ruh* does not consist of persons, but is a species that exclusively consists of one individual. Gabriel is an angel, and the *ruh* is a reality that is different from the angels.

At any rate, the angels and the *ruh* are two distinct groups. Moreover, the angels are such that they get help from the *ruh*. They are accompanied by the *ruh* when they depart to carry out their tasks, and the *ruh* supports them: ***'He descendeth the angels with the Spirit* (*ruh*) *of His command upon whomever He wills amongst His servants.'*** (***16:2***)

Also, given that *ruh* (Spirit) is expressed in singular form in the Qur'an while the angels are mentioned in plural, one may infer that the status of the *ruh* is more comprehensive (*jami'*) than that of the angels. The *ruh* is closer to God, even closer than Gabriel, and there are narrations that confirm this.

The spirit and the angels

STUDENT. What rapport is there between this Spirit (*ruh*) and the human spirit (*ruh*)? Why is the human spirit called '*ruh'*? Is it because it has some bond and connection with the Spirit? Can we think of the relation between the Spirit and the human spirits as that of a natural universal (*al-kulli al-tabi'i*) and its particulars?[5]

Also, in the noble verse,

And they ask thee concerning the ruh. Say: the ruh is of the command of my Lord… (***17:85***)

which *ruh* is being questioned about? Is it the same Spirit as in the other verses, or is it the human

spirit?

‘ALLAMAH. As already mentioned, the *ruh* is a creature greater than the angels, and it is has nothing to do with man or the human spirit. It is a matter of terminology that they both share the same term *‘ruh’*, but their meanings are different. The connection between the two might be that by means of effort and worship, man’s rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*, i.e. the human spirit) can reach a station where it becomes parallel to and on a par with that Spirit (*ruh*).

And in the noble verse mentioned above (17:85), the question is about *ruh* in its absolute and unrestricted sense, not the human rational soul in particular. And the response is, ‘The *ruh* is of the command of my Lord,’ which indicates that the *ruh* belongs to the Realm of Command (*‘alam al-amr*), as opposed to mankind, which belongs to the Realm of Creation (*‘alam al-khalq*). Those asking the question do not mention the human spirit at all. It seems that the question is about *ruh* as mentioned in the Qur’an. And what is quite remarkable is that the verse ends with,

… And you have been given of knowledge but little. (***17:85***)

It means that it is beyond human knowledge to know the creation and reality of the *ruh*; it is not easily graspable.

The first thing that Allah created

STUDENT. Is this *ruh* the same as what is referred to in some narrations as ‘The first thing that Allah created’? That is, is it the ‘closest screen’ (*al-hijab al-aqrab*)? And in philosophy, is it the same as the First Intellect (*al-’aql al-awwal*)?

‘ALLAMAH. The narrations have mentioned several things as ‘The first thing that Allah created.’ For example:

The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.

The intellect, the water, the Tablet (*lawh*), and the Pen (*qalam*) have also been identified as the first thing that Allah created.[6] But among all these, I think the clearest and most robust narration is that ‘The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.’ There is a verse toward the end of Chapter 42 (al-Shura):

And thus We have revealed to thee a Spirit of Our command. Thou knew not what the Book was nor the faith; but We made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed thou dost guide unto a straight path. (***42:52***)

It is inferred from this verse that the Messenger of Allah came to know the faith and the Book through Allah’s revelation of the *ruh* upon him. And this happened through the connection that the Prophet’s

spirit (*ruh*) had with that great creature, the Spirit (*ruh*). So the Prophet's spirit had the same origin as the Spirit, and that is 'the first thing that Allah created.'

In philosophy, the First Intellect may be identified as the *ruh*, on the condition that it does not lose its properties. That is, the First Intellect should maintain its immateriality and unconditionality; otherwise it would not be the First Intellect. As it comes lower and becomes more and more determined (*ta'ayyun*), it becomes other (lower) intellects, and the lower it goes, the more it loses its breadth and unconditionality (*itlaq*).

In its Arc of Ascent (*qaws al-su'ud*), the spirit of the Messenger of Allah has reached the same position where it came and descended from, which is the plane of the *ruh* (Spirit). That is because the first thing that God created was the light of His Messenger, which is the same as the *ruh*. Then after its creation, the spirit of the Messenger of Allah set on its Arc of Descent (*qaws al-nuzul*) and passed the realms one by one, until it reached the realm of nature and matter. Therefore through its Arc of Ascent, it reached the same initial position once again, whereby the beginning (*azal*) and the end (*abad*) are united together.

So the Spirit (*ruh*, which is not separate from the Prophet's spirit) descended from its origin and kept descending until it reached the corporeal world. Then, by means of transubstantial motion (*al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*), it gradually advanced toward its perfection, until it ultimately reached the same status of 'The first thing that Allah created was the light of your prophet, O Jabir.' So nothing new comes to existence. It is exactly what used to be – only that it has gone through a cycle of descent and ascent.

It is very strange how the affairs of the universe are managed, how the angels direct and coordinate everything, and how the Spirit plays a role in all that. Of course there is no contradiction between their roles. Their involvement in creating the affairs of the corporeal world is truly astonishing and incredible.

Imagine how many angels would be required for something very particular. For example, consider the creation of a single atom in a person's body or elsewhere. If that involves one angel, then think of the number of atoms in the human body; there would be as many angels. What a crowd that would be!

And of course there are different angels out there, like those that bestow power, those that bestow knowledge, and so on. There are certain angels as guards and protectors, whose job is to ward off afflictions and tribulations, and to prevent people from suffering injuries.[7] Likewise there is a different group of angels for each affair. So imagine how many angels there are for each human being. And going beyond one person, how many angels there are for all human beings? Then think of the number of all animals, plants and objects. Glory be to Allah; such a universe we have!

STUDENT. Is any of the four archangels – Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and 'Izra'il – superior (*jami'*) to the others?[8] That is, apart from the *ruh*, is there a superior angel, who directs and commands over the other angels?

‘ALLAMAH. Apparently there is no superior among the four archangels, although there seems to be some hints about Gabriel, as mentioned in Chapter 78 (al-Naba’).[9] But still it is not the case of a superior being. One cannot say that Gabriel’s supremacy over the angels under his command is that of a superior (*jami’*) over the individuals (*afrad*).

(May Allah guide us. We cannot do anything. With these conditions, all these ups and downs, the ascent and the descent, where should one turn to? What can our intellect grasp? How should we even approach these topics? By God I do not know.)

The impact of supplication and the role of the angels in its acceptance

STUDENT. Sometimes a person makes a supplication (*du’a’*) that is accepted (i.e. realised). For example one may pray for a garden to blossom, a well to spring water, a patient to recover, and so on. As a result of that, thousands of angels will be assigned to plan, process and carry out the supplicant’s request. And they finally realise and objectify it by God’s permission (*idhn*). That is, there are all these different groups of angels who work in order to actualise and bring about that matter. So can we say that in a sense, these angels are ‘under the command’ of the supplicant?

‘ALLAMAH. Instead of saying that they are under the command of the supplicant, it is better to say that they are under God’s command to realise the supplicant’s request.

STUDENT. Previously you mentioned how there can be unity in plurality,[10] and you discussed these three verses:

Allah captureth the souls at the time of their death…. (***39:42***)

… The angel of death captureth you…. (***32:11***)

… Our emissaries capture him…. (***6:61***)

The act is an action of God, nonetheless the Angel of Death is also involved under God’s permission (*idhn*), and the other angels are involved with the permission of the Angel of Death. So in this sense of unity (*wahdah*) in plurality (*kathrah*), can one consider the angels that bring about a supplication as being under the command and order of the person who makes supplication and petition (*du’a’* and *tadarru’*) to Allah?

‘ALLAMAH. Yes, that is also one way of putting it and it is true if the full account is given. For, after all, ‘There is no occupant in the house except Him.’

The whole universe absolutely and fully belongs to God alone, and no being has any impact in the cosmos except by God’s will and permission. Therefore any impact that we observe from any being

reduces to God and belongs to Him.

STUDENT. There have been times when one of the prophets or saints (*awliya'*) had a wish deep in his heart, with an inner inclination and desire for it to come true. Yet he would not make a supplication for his wish, but despite that, the wish would come to realisation by itself. That is, their mere will and inner inclination would influence and take control of the external function of the angels. But there have also been other times when their inner inclination, even when accompanied with explicit supplication, had no impact, and their wish would not be realised as they wanted.

Can one say that in the latter cases their supplications and requests were at odds with the supplication of another soul or souls? That is, can one say that in the supernatural realm, the request was prevented by the power of one or more other souls?

This of course happens a lot for other than the prophets and saints, when their wish is against the wish of a more powerful soul who wants the opposite. Therefore each person's supplication provokes and arouses a different set of angels to carry out the task, by God's permission of course. Thus, the purer and stronger soul would dominate, and the set of angels working for that request would take the lead from the other group of angels and objectify the
request of the stronger soul.

'ALLAMAH. Yes, all these are possible, and there is a verse in Chapter 13 (al-Ra'd) that implies this idea.[11]

STUDENT. Previously you had a great passion for philosophy, much more than now. Now you are more engaged in the Noble Qur'an. And you would not refrain from talking about your personal states like unveilings (*mukashafat*) and intuitions of the heart (*waridat*), but now you have strangely and mysteriously closed the doors tight! What is going on?

'ALLAMAH. Yes, I guess 'that crock broke, and that glass tipped over' (i.e. those days are over). Currently my physical condition, particularly the forgetfulness that has overcome me, holds me back from my activities. I cannot work anymore, and it is by God's grace that I am engaged in the Glorious Qur'an – may Allah accept it! But the peculiar amnesia of mine is really tough on me. In terms of studying and writing, I used to be busy almost day and night, with rarely any exception. I was always so busy writing, contemplating and studying. But all that has stopped for now.

STUDENT. Well this is a merit after all! Being immersed in the universal (*kulli*) prevents one from the particular. It is like absorbing the universal Spirit (*ruh*) in a state of trance (*khalsah*).

'ALLAMAH. Is that so? Now you call that a merit? We would be thankful for the merit that Allah gives, no problem, but is this a merit? This is amnesia. Your point is correct, but what I feel is just amnesia. A state of sleepiness is usually noticeable in my eyes, as if they are filled with sleep or with dust. But then if I try to sleep I do not fall asleep. It is just this [odd] condition. Anyway, 'The good is in that which

happpened' (*al-khayr fima waqa'a*). My condition is not like a state of trance; it is a certain state of lethargy, especially with the drowsiness in my eyes. We have to pray to Allah for recovery, if He wills. Only may Allah aid us; otherwise we cannot do anything on our own.

Barzakh is for everyone

A third person: Is the realm of *barzakh* (the intermediate life between one's death and the Day of Resurrection) for everyone, or is it only for those who have reached perfection in either faith (*iman*) or infidelity (*kufr*)? One of the verses of the Qur'an about *barzakh* is:

And count not those who were slain in Allah's way as dead, but they are living, and receive provision there with their Lord. (***3:169***)

This verse establishes the receipt of provision in *barzakh* only for those who have been killed in God's way. Therefore can we conclude that *barzakh* is not for everyone?

'ALLAMAH. In some narrations there is this idea that only those who have achieved perfection go through *barzakh* after death. That is, *barzakh* is only for two parties: those who have perfect faith and those who have perfect infidelity. And a third party consists of those who have not achieved either perfect infidelity or perfect faith, and thus they will not experience *barzakh*. That would mean that *barzakh* is exclusively for the perfect ones among the people of Islam and the people of infidelity (*kufr*).

But based on some other narrations *barzakh* is not just for the perfect ones. Instead, everyone goes through the realm of *barzakh* after death and before the Resurrection (*qiyamah*).

And the above verse (3:169) does not imply that no one apart from the martyrs in the path of Allah receives provision in *barzakh*. That is because first of all, the following verse says,

[***They are***] ***jubilant because of that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty, and rejoice for those behind them who have not joined them, for they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.*** (***3:170***)

This verse says that the martyrs are happy for those who have not joined them yet. And it is evident that those who have not joined them are all of the believers that are still alive and not necessarily those that will become martyrs.

The realm of barzakh starts right after one's death

'ALLAMAH. And second, there are two verses in the Noble Qur'an that entail that *barzakh* is for everyone, and that people enter the realm of *barzakh* right after death and with no delay.

The first one is in Chapter 36 (Ya-Sin), which narrates the story of two prophets who were sent by

Prophet Jesus to the city of Antioch for preaching. The two prophets went there and started preaching, but the general population did not accept their call. [Neither did they accept their call when a third prophet was sent.] Thus a man from the outskirts of the city came to help the messengers:

And there came a man from the furthest part of the city, running; he said, 'My people, follow the messengers.' (***36:20***)

He preached and advised his people, and he finally said,

Lo! I believe in your Lord, so hear me, (***36:25***)

whereby the mob killed that man of God. Then the Qur'an says:

He was told, 'Enter Paradise!' He said, 'I wish my people would know * That my Lord forgave me and made me of the honoured ones.' (***36:26–7***)

He was told to enter the Paradise right upon his death, and that is when he said, 'I wish my relatives and my tribe knew how God blessed me with His grace, forgiveness and honour.'

The second verse is in Chapter 71 (Nuh) and is similar to the first one, except that it is the other side of the story. That pervious case was about a believer, and this one is about the infidels and transgressors:

Because of their sins they were drowned and thereupon entered a fire.... (***71:25***)

Noah's tribe were exterminated and drowned as a result of their sins, wrongdoings and misconduct. And after drowning, they immediately entered the fire. 'Thereupon they entered a fire' means that there was no pause or delay.

Most of the famous and multiple (*mustafidah*) narrations imply that *barzakh* is for all classes of infidels and Muslims, including those with perfect salvation or damnation and those in between. There are some narrations against that, but they are not reliable. Shaykh al–Mufid, be he blessed, held the view that 'No one is questioned in the grave except the one who perfected faith to the utmost or the one who perfected infidelity to the utmost; the rest are neglected.'[12]

Heaven and hell currently exist

And speed toward a forgiveness from your Lord and a paradise whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the self–restrained. (***3:133***)

STUDENT. In the above verse, does the term 'has been prepared' (*u'iddat*) imply that paradise exists now?

'ALLAMAH. Yes, more or less.

STUDENT. If so, how would that comply with the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-a'mal*)?[13] For an action must first be carried out in order for it to build the heaven or hell!

'ALLAMAH. But there is also another point in the Noble Qur'an:

Truly thou wast in heedlessness of this; thus We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight is piercing today. (***50:22***)

This verse affirms that what is observed on the Day of Resurrection had existed and was observable in this world, except that people were heedless of it. Heaven and Hell had actually existed in this world and people had observed them, but they were heedless in their observation.

People are heedless of the fact of the matter and the reality of the world. Therefore Heaven and Hell are present in this world, though people are inattentive of them. And as we said before, the believer from the family of Yasin entered Heaven right after he was killed (36:26), and Noah's tribe entered the fire right after their drowning in water (71:25).

The speaking of ruwaybidah and the emergence of Ya'juj and Ma'juj

STUDENT. There is a tradition that mentions the signs of the end of the universe (*akhir al-zaman*). It says:

And at that time the *ruwaybidah* will speak.[14]

What is meant by *ruwaybidah*? And [in the other narrations,] who is the Dajjal? And what about Ya'juj and Ma'juj (Gog and Magog)?

'ALLAMAH. Based on the narrations, one of the signs of the Resurrection (*ashrat al-sa'ah*) is that the *ruwaybidah* will speak, and apparently '*ruwaybidah'* refers to the ignoble and insignificant individuals in the society. Their 'speaking' means that they will become administrative and political authorities.

Then there are many narrations on the topic of the Dajjal (lit. 'liar' and 'deceiver'). He emerges before the appearance of Imam Mahdi (may our souls be sacrificed for him) and misguides the people. There are some narrations that describe him in detail, but those narrations are not reliable. For example, there is a narration that the Dajjal is a man who rides a donkey, and as he moves, the Paradise and Hell move with him on his right and his left [respectively].

The Dajjal is also mentioned in the narrations reported by the Sunni authorities. There are narrations about his birth, and there is even a narration that the Messenger of Allah was informed about him, whereby the Prophet went to him, or he came to the Prophet. Some of what has been said about him is certainly not reliable; for example it is said that his donkey is one *farsakh* (about 5.375 km) long. How

could that be?[15]

And Ya'juj and Ma'juj are apparently two societies of mankind from the Caucasus (Qafqaz) Mountain. That is where Dhu al-Qarnayn built a dam to prevent them from attacking that region (see 18:92–8). And some have held that they were two Mongolian tribes.[16] There is a verse in the Glorious Qur'an about Ya'juj and Ma'juj, that they will rush down from all heights [before the Resurrection]:

Until when Gog and Magog are freed, and they hasten out of every mound. (***21:96***)

There are some narrations about the details of their creation, like that their ears are so huge that they turn one into a mat on which they sleep and use the other as a blanket. These narrations are reported by Sunni authorities, and it seems quite clear that they are unauthentic, and should not be accepted.[17]

The Messenger of Allah was also the prophet of the jinn

STUDENT. How is it that the prophet of the jinn is from mankind? On one hand, based on the Noble Qur'an, the prophet of every group, class and kind of creatures should be of the same kind. That is why in the Qur'an Allah requires the polytheists to follow His Messenger, who is a human being. And when they objected that 'Why did God not send angels toward people to convey His message,' the Noble Qur'an replies,

And had We made him an angel, We surely would have made him a man, and confused for them what they confuse. (***6:9***)

On the other hand, there are other verses in the Noble Qur'an that clearly speak of the belief of the jinn in the Prophet and the Qur'an:

Say: it hath been revealed unto me that a company of the jinn listened [***to the Qur'an***] ***and then they said, 'We have indeed heard a marvellous Qur'an * It guideth to rectitude, so we believe in it, and we never associate with our Lord anyone.'*** (***72:1–2***)

And indeed when we heard the guidance we believed in it; and whoso believeth in his Lord shall fear neither any loss nor any oppression. (***72:13***)

And when We turned toward thee a company of jinn listening to the Qur'an; and once they were in its presence they said, 'Be silent!' Then as it ended they returned to their people warning * They said, 'O Our people, indeed we have heard a book that was sent down after Moses, confirming what was before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight path * O our people, respond to Allah's summoner and believe in Him; He will forgive you part of your sins and shield you from a painful punishment * And whoso respondeth not to Allah's summoner cannot frustrate Him in the earth, and hath no supporter apart from Him. Those are in obvious misguidance.' (***46:29–32***)

O tribe of jinn and men, if you are able to penetrate through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate [***through them***]***. You shall not penetrate except with an authority*** [***from Allah***]***.*** (***55:33***)

This last verse is more evident than the other ones, as it addresses and challenges both the jinn and mankind. But if the Messenger of Allah were not a prophet and messenger for the group of jinn, it would have not been appropriate for the Glorious Qur'an – which flows from the Prophet's tongue – to challenge them.

'ALLAMAH. Yes, apparently the prophet of the jinn is a human being. And incidentally when the jinn were asked about this at time of summoning (*ihdar*) they replied, 'We do not have any prophet from the jinn; but our prophet is Prophet Muhammad son of 'Abdullah (peace and mercy be upon him and his family).'

STUDENT. In order to explain this, one may say that man and jinn are both corporeal beings, except that man is of earth and jinn is of fire and smoke. In fact, it is due to the jinn's extent of delicacy that they cannot be seen by physical eyes. Man and jinn both fall under the same category, but jinn are of a lower degree [of existence] compared to man. That is why the same rules apply to both of them. Is that a reasonable explanation?

'ALLAMAH. That is the only thing one can say in order to explain this matter. The creation of jinn is subsidiary to mankind and their existence is for the sake of human beings. That is why they have the same prophet. And the duties and rites have been specified and tailored for each of the two groups according to their strengths and weaknesses. The following verse bears witness to this:

O tribe of jinn and mankind, did messengers from yourselves not come to you, recounting to you My signs and warning you of the encounter of this day of yours?… (***6:130***)

This verse addresses both the jinn and men and tells them, 'Did messengers of your own kind not come to you?' But we know that the jinn do not have a prophet of themselves, and they share the prophet of men. But it is still true to say, 'messengers from yourselves' because jinn and man are both material and corporeal. They are of the same genus (*jins*) and so the same prophet has been sent for both groups. It is only that compared to the jinn, man is stronger and jinn is relatively weaker. So in the above verse, 'from yourselves' does not mean being specifically of earth or fire.

The science of abjad Letters and its branches

STUDENT. Please speak, in brief or at length, about the *abjad* letters, their inferences, extrapolations, and significance, as discussed in the books. Also, please explain how the *abjad* calculation is divided into *kabir* ('big'), *saghir* ('small') and *wasit* ('intermediate'), and the significance of each.

'ALLAMAH. Apparently *al-abjad al-kabir* (big) is a well-established and agreed-upon process. It

involves the division of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet over the numbers ranging from one to one thousand. And all Muslims – both Shi'a and Sunni – unanimously concur on it. The scholars of both sects, such as Baha' al-Din al-'Amili (Shaykh al-Baha'i) and Muhyi al-Din [ibn] al-'Arabi have expounded on the subject.

Al-abjad al-kabir is also known among non-Muslims. It was practiced by the Jews before Islam, and Muslims adopted it from Hebrew. Incidentally, the Hebrew alphabet has only twenty-two letters. They lack the last six letters in the *abjad* order: *th*ʾ, *kh*ʾ, *dh*ʾ*l*, ʾʾ*d*, ʾʾ, and *ghayn*. Therefore their letters only go up to *qarishat* (see below). Nonetheless they believe in *al-abjad al-kabir* and split the numbers ranging from one to a thousand over their letters.

One day I was attending a session with some experts in this field. They were discussing how the numbers one to one thousand can be divided over the Hebrew alphabet, which consists of twenty-two letters. I objected, 'The Hebrew alphabet only goes up to *qarishat*, and letter *t*ʾ is number four hundred [i.e. the highest number that their alphabet reaches]. So how can they practice *abjad*?' They explained that 'They incorporate the other six numbers in their alphabet by certain means, so that their numbers start from one and end with one thousand.'

There was also a Japanese philosopher in that meeting.[18] I asked him, 'Do you [also] believe in the impact and power of the letters?'

'Yes, we believe in the letters of *al-abjad al-kabir*!' he replied. 'And we have some truly remarkable ancient books on this subject' – even though Japanese doctrines are rooted in those of the Chinese, who are not monotheists.

Apparently the Japanese and Chinese alphabets have three hundred letters (characters). But they somehow manage to divide the twenty-eight numbers (of *abjad*) that span from one to a thousand over their entire alphabet. That is amazing. Perhaps they end up counting many of their letters that have a similar pronunciation as one letter, like in Persian where *ch* is treated as *j* (*jim*), *zh* as *z* (*z*ʾ), *g* as *k* (*k*ʾ*f*) and *p* as *b* (*b*ʾ). That is why calculating the *abjad* numbers in Chinese is very difficult. It is a skill in itself, and as it has been said, only their adept scholars can go about it.

One of the impacts of the *abjad* calculation is that dividing and placing the noble verse, *bism All*ʾ*h al-Ra*ʾ*m*ʾ*n al-Ra*ʾ*im* (In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate) into a square based on the *abjad* letters is beneficial in repelling the jinn and those possessed by the jinn.

In *al-abjad al-kabir*, each letter of the twenty-eight Arabic letters has a number, and the numbers begin with one and end with one thousand. It goes like this: *abjad*, *hawwaz*, ʾ*u*ʾʾ*i*, *kaliman*, *sa'fa*ʾ, *qarishat*, *thakhkhidh*,
*a*ʾ*igh*, *l*ʾ.

أ ب ج د ه و ز ح ط ي

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
‘ b j d h w Z y
ك ل م ن س ع ف ص ق ر
20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 200
k l m n s ‘ f q r

ش
ت
ث
خ
ذ
ض
ظ
غ
ا
300
400
500
600
700
800
900
1000
1
Sh
t
th
kh
dh

gh

Hamzah (‘) and *alif* (*a*,) are both number one. Letters with stress (*shaddah*, *tashd d*) are only counted once. For example, the term ‘*Aliyy* (i.e. ‘Al) is numbered 110, because *‘* is 70, *l* is 30 and *y* is 10. So they add up to 110 (*y* counts only once).

And the word *Qudd s* is numbered 170; since *q* is 100, *d* is 4, *w* ( ) is 6 and *s* is 60. Here, *d* is not counted twice.

And the word *Fa”l* is numbered 181; because *f* is 80, *‘* is 70, is 1 and *l* is 30.

One exception is the *l* (*l□m*) in the Majestic Word 'Allah'. It has a stress, but it is counted twice. Also, the middle □ (*alif*) in 'Allah' is not counted. Therefore 'Allah' is 66, because *a* is 1, *l* is 30 (and it counts twice), and *h* is 5. That is why in writing, 'Allah' is not written with a stress (*shaddah*), for the *l* (*l□m*) is written twice and thus it should not be stressed again. It is for the same reason that the middle □ (*alif*) is not written, because it is not included in the *abjad* calculation. So the word is written with two consecutive '*l*'s and without an '□', like '*Allh*' (اللہ)

If it were not for the exception, the word should have been written as '*A□□h*' (with a stress on *l* i.e. اللّٰہ). Since Arabic writing is based on *abjad* numbers, '*A□□h'* should be written as '*Allh'* [as it is conventionally written, except that it should not have a *shaddah*].

The fact that the stressed letters are written only once shows that they should count only once when retrieving the *abjad* number of a given word. And for the same reason, the word *il□h* (deity, worshipped one) is written as '*ilh*' (إلٰہ), without the middle □ (*alif*). That is because the middle □ in is not included in the count, and so the corresponding number to *il□h* is 36. Similarly, the □ in *Ra□m□n* is not counted either. That is why it is written as '*Ra□man*' (رَحمَن) without the □ (*alif*), which means that its number is 298.

This was about *al-abjad al-kabir* ('big' *abjad*).

But in *al-abjad al-saghir* ('small' *abjad*), the number of a letter is the remainder that is obtained when we divide the *abjad* (*al-kabir*) number of that letter by nine. For example, letter *y* (*ya*) is numbered one in *al-abjad al-saghir*, because it is number 10 in *al-abjad al-kabir*, and deducting nine from that gives us one. Letter *n* (*nun*) is five in *al-abjad al-saghir*, because when five times nine is deducted from fifty (the number of *n* in *al-abjad al-kabir*) the remainder is five. And therefore in *al-abjad al-saghir*, letters □ (□□'), □ (□□*d*) and □ (□□') do not have a number at all (because they are whole multiples of nine). If multiples of nine are deducted from their *al-abjad al-kabir* number, nothing would remain.

And as with *al-abjad al-wasit* ('intermediate' *abjad*), it numbers the letters based on the remainder of their *al-abjad al-al-kabir* number when divided by 12, just like the procedure in *al-abjad al-saghir*.

There is also *al-abjad al-akbar* ('greater' *abjad*), where the number of each letter is multiplied by ten. For example, letter *y* (*y□*) would be number 100 in *al-abjad al-akbar*, and the letter *gh* (*ghayn*) would be 10,000, and so on with the other letters.

Apart from the above division, one should also know that there are two methods of numbering any word: *mujmal* ('undifferentiated') and *mufassal* ('differentiated').

The *mujmal* method is to count the letters of a word as they appear in the word (as discussed above). For example, the word '*Quddus*' ('Sacrosanct') has four letters: *q*, *d*, *w*, *s*, with numbers 100, 4, 6 and 60, respectively. And the word '*Fa''□l*' ('Doer') has four letters: *f*, *'*, □, *l*, with numbers 80, 70, 1 and 30, respectively. And there are ten letters in '*y□ A□ad y□ □amad*' ('O One, O Independent'):

10 1 1 8 4 10 1 90 40 4
y □ ‘ □ d y □ □ m d

Therefore in the *mujmal* method, ‘*Qudd□s’* is 170, ‘*Fa”□l*’ is 181 and ‘*y□ A□ad y□ □amad*’ is 169.

But in the *mufassal* method, each letter is counted as it is pronounced. It includes the subsequent letters that appear in each letter’s name. For example ‘*Qudd□s’* has four letters: *q*, *d*, *w*, and *s*:

Q is pronounced *q□f*, so it should count as three letters: *q* (100), □ (1), and *f* (80). Thus, *q□f* alone will be 181.

D is pronounced *d□l*, therefore it should count as three letters: *d* (4), □ (1), and *l* (30). Thus, *d□l* is numbered 35.

W is pronounced *w□w*, thus it should count as three letters: *w* (6), □ (1), and *w* (6).

And *s* is pronounced *s□n*, so it should count as three letters: *s* (60), *y* (10), and *n* (50).

Hence, the word ‘*Qudd□s*’ will be 349 based on the *mufassal* numbering, while it was 170 under the *mujmal* method.

Another example: ‘*y□ A□ad y□ □amad*’ is pronounced as:

10 1 1 8 4 10 1 90 40 4
y □ ‘ □ d y □ □ m d

But once we expand it, it will be pronounced as: ‘*y□*, *alif*, *alif*, *□□*, *d□l*, *y□*, *alif*, *□□d*, *m□m*, *d□l’*.[19] Therefore, each of these letters should be included in the count:

10 1 1 30 80 1 30 80 8 1 4 1 30
y □ ‘ l f ‘ l f □ □ d □ l
10 1 1 30 80 90 1 4 40 10 40 4 1 30
y □ ‘ l f □ □ d m y m d □ l

Hence, the *mufassal* number for the phrase, ‘*y□ A□ad y□ □amad*’ is 619, while it was 169 under the *mujmal* method.

Tayy al-ard and the beginning of Chapter Ta-Ha

STUDENT. What is the truth behind *tayy al-ard* (‘folding up of the earth’, instantaneous self-transportation)? And how can it be explained philosophically?

‘ALLAMAH. Its reality is the winding of the earth beneath the feet of a walker.

My brother, the late Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi had a student who used to summon spirits (not using a mirror or a triangular table, but he used to instantly summon the spirits by passing his hand over

his eyes). One day, through that student, my brother asked the spirit of the late Qadi about *tayy al-ard*.

The late Qadi answered, '*Tayy al-ard* is six verses from the beginning of Chapter 20 [Ta-Ha].'

Ta-Ha * We have not revealed the Qur'an upon thee so that thou be distressed * But as a reminder to him who feareth * A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the high heavens * The All-Merciful* [Who***] ***arose*** [***and dominated***] ***upon the Throne * To Him belongth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth and whatsoever is between them and whatsoever is beneath the ground * And if thou speakest aloud, then He truly knoweth the secret and that which is more hidden * Allah is but Whom there is no deity; for Him are the Most Beautiful Names.*** (***20:1-8***)

STUDENT. What does that mean? Was the late Qadi indirectly and secretly implying that *tayy al-ard* is achieved when one realises and characterises the Divine Attributes in one's self?

'ALLAMAH. No. My brother was a sharp and discerning man. The way he quoted Mr Qadi's reply was as if he had already arrived at the procedure for *tayy al-ard* from these verses.

These verses are very remarkable, especially the verse, ***'Allah is but Whom there is no deity; for Him are the Most Beautiful Names'*** (***20:8***). It makes note of all the excellent Names that are gathered in the Sacred Being of God. In this regard there is no verse as comprehensive as this verse in the Noble Qur'an.

The late Qadi always used to go from Najaf to Karbala' on days of *ziyarah* ('pilgrimage'; the days when *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn is specifically recommended). But no one had ever seen him get on a vehicle, and no one found about his secret, except for a tradesman in the Clock Market (also called the Great Market, *bazar-i buzurg*, in Najaf). The tradesman had gone to the sanctified city of Mashhad and saw the late Qadi there. There was a problem with that person's passport, for which he sought help from the late Qadi, and the late Qadi solved his problem. When that man returned to Najaf he claimed to have seen Mr Qadi in Mashhad.

And that infuriated the late Qadi. 'Everyone knows' he said, 'that I have been in Najaf and have not taken any trips.'

The late Qadi's inquiry about Prophet Solomon's flying in the air

'ALLAMAH. Then, through his student, my brother asked the Honourable Qadi, 'Was Prophet Solomon's carpet, on which he used to sit and fly to the East and West, made with ordinary instruments, and did it operate based on natural laws? Or was it an independent divine invention without any connection to with the laws of nature?'

The late Qadi replied, 'I cannot think of an answer for that at the moment, but a creature that lived the

time of Prophet Solomon and was involved in that business is currently alive. I will go and ask him.' Thus the late Qadi set off and walked for a while, until a mountain came into view. As he reached the hillside, a ghost that resembled a human being was seen in the middle of the mountain. The late Qadi talked to the ghost for a while and asked some questions, of which my brother's student did not understand anything. Then the late Qadi returned and said, 'He says that it was a totally new and unique creation of God, and it did not operate based on natural causes.'

STUDENT. But the matter of *tayy al-ard* is still ambiguous. There are a few things here. One is that in *tayy al-ard*, the traveller does not walk over the earth as would be the case of speeding up and getting to the destination in no time or in a short time. Neither does the person exterminate his body at the origin and create it at the destination. But rather the earth winds beneath the traveller's feet, and he gets to the destination in a very short time as a result of this winding. But there is a clear problem with this.

First, we see that the condition of the earth does not change when one performs *tayy al-ard*. Everything stays in its own place, people are all in their own positions, and the winding and wrapping only occurs with respect to the traveller. But assuming that *tayy al-ard* is a real occurrence in the outside – and not an imaginary or illusive event – then it would not be reasonable for a material body (the earth) to move *without* changing its relationship and position with respect to the beings with which it is related.

Moreover, it is possible to have two folding-ups of the earth at the same time in opposite directions. That would entail the movement of matter in two opposite directions, and the change of position and relation of every related object in two opposing ways, which is logically impossible.

Second, in your discussions about the miracles (*i'jaz*) of the prophets in *al-Mizan*, you have argued that 'A miracle is not opposed to the physical laws. It does not deny the natural systems of causes and effects, but it [only] causes the speeding-up of the process whereby the causes give rise to the effects. For example, it is naturally possible for a cane to become a living organism and a serpent, as it did for Prophet Moses (peace be upon our prophet and his family and upon him). However, it would take thousands of years for this transformation to take place through its chain of various natural causes. But in a miracle, these causes do their job instantly, and the effect and result appears right away, due to the will of God or His messenger.'[20] But *tayy al-ard* would violate the order of nature, because the existents cannot maintain their original positions with respect to the traveller.

'ALLAMAH. (Replying after a long period of thinking, with his head down) *Tayy al-ard* is a supernatural event (*khariq al-'adah*).

STUDENT. Fair enough, *tayy al-ard* is a supernatural event; but the problem is the logical impossibility.

It is like when one physically passes through a wall or ceiling without the splitting or tearing of the wall and without its being broken and fixed again. Yet prominent mystics claim that there is nothing wrong with that, and it does happen.

‘ALLAMAH. That is right; there is no problem with that. And the evidence for it is that in one gathering, they wanted to show that the jinn can enter through closed doors and take whatever they want. So they locked the lid of a chest containing bundles of clothing, and had a stout man sit on the chest.

Even so, they immediately found the bundles of clothing outside the chest, and when they opened the chest they found it empty. So it became clear that the jinn had brought out the bundles at once, and that was not an illusion or magic.

STUDENT. But that does not solve the problem. And the question, with all its complexities, remains as it was.

‘ALLAMAH. It is a supernatural matter (*kharq al-’adah*).

STUDENT. Did Ibn Sina do any study and analysis on the subject of *tayy al-ard*? After all, he was quite good at identifying and investigating the physical causes of various events.

‘ALLAMAH. I have not seen any discussion of *tayy al-ard* anywhere in his works. But he believes in supernatural events and confirms the miracles of the prophets.

Incidentally, there is a verse about the throne of Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba):

And one with whom was some knowledge of the Book said, ‘I will bring it to thee before thy glance returneth to thee (***yartadda ilayka tarfuk***)***.’ Then when he saw it settled before him he said, ‘This is of my Lord’s bounty… ’.*** (***27:40***)

Here, ‘*yartadda ilayka tarfuk*’ does not mean blinking of the eye, because *tarf* does not mean eyelid. It is a thousand times faster than blinking. If it meant blinking of the eye, the verse should have continued with, ‘Then when he saw it settled before him before having blinked.’

Rather, *tarf* means to look with the side of the eye, and thus ‘*yartadda ilayka tarfuk*’ means, ‘before your look returns.’ It concerns the act of seeing. What happens when one sees an object is that the rays of light reflect from the object and enter the person’s eye, based on the laws of reflection and refraction. So he is saying, ‘I will bring Bilqis’ throne for you before you see what you are about to see!’

That means faster than the speed of light, which is fifty thousand *farsakh* per second (almost three hundred thousand kilometres per second).

And the Qur’an does not mention that the person brought the throne, but it says, ‘When Solomon saw the throne before him.’ That is, after this conversation and discussion with the person who had some knowledge of the Book, he suddenly found the throne settled before him. This is a case of *tayy al-ard*.

The stages of tayy al-ard and its reality

STUDENT. Does *tayy al-ard* ('folding up of the earth', instantaneous self-transportation) consist of exterminating one's body at the origin and generating and emerging it at the destination? Is this not the basic idea behind *tayy al-ard*, that the person who possesses this power generates and emerges himself at once at the desired location, through the divine and celestial will with which he is endowed?

'ALLAMAH. That seems to be it.

STUDENT. Seems to be, or is?

'ALLAMAH . It really is so.

STUDENT. Then there are some issues to be resolved. It must be that only the purified divine souls can possess this power. As long as one has not achieved gnosis of the soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) accompanied by gnosis of the Lord (*ma'rifat al-Rabb*), and as long as one cannot alter and take control (*tasarruf*) over the contingent beings, he should not be able to perform *tayy al-ard*. But then how can one explain the accounts of *tayy al-ard* performed by non-complete individuals?

'ALLAMAH. There are no such accounts about non-complete individuals. It is only performed by those who have achieved perfection.[21]

STUDENT. Based on narrations and historical accounts, perfect individuals have sometimes taken others with themselves on *tayy al-ard*. That would mean that in addition to creating his own body, the divine and creative soul of a perfect person is also capable of creating other bodies at the desired destination.

'ALLAMAH. That is right.

STUDENT. How is it that for some people, *tayy al-ard* is not instantaneous, but takes some time, say five or ten minutes or more?

'ALLAMAH. Their *tayy al-ard* is incomplete because they have not reached the state of perfection. So they need to spend some time and apply more power in order to create bodies at the desired destination. For example, the *tayy al-ard* of the jinn usually takes time. When talking about bringing Bilqis' throne the Noble Qur'an says:

A devil of the jinn said, 'I bring it to thee before thou risest from thy place... '. (***27:39***)

And rising from one's place certainly takes some time, even if it is very quick.

STUDENT. If so, then why should one insist on reconciling *tayy al-ard* with physical causality, like the attempts that have been made to show that the miracles of the prophets are nothing beyond the laws of

nature?

Instead, one can say that *tayy al-ard* occurs as a result of a divine will, 'Be!' (*kun*), which directly and instantly brings about the result (*yakun*). (In that case, one would not argue that one's body rapidly passes through the series of required intermediate stages in a transubstantial motion, *al-harkat al-jawhariyyah*.) So the first body – with its characteristics of position, time, and other properties – becomes a second body with another set of properties of position, time, and so on. And so is the case with miracles and supernatural events (i.e. there is no need to explain them as accelerated processes of physical causality).

'ALLAMAH. Yes, it can be put this way.

'The name should delight you'; 'And truly of his followers was Abraham'

STUDENT. There is a narration from Imam Baqir that 'The name should delight you!'

The reporter asked, 'May I be sacrificed for you, what name?' The Imam replied, 'The two words [i.e. verses] of Him [Allah]:

And truly [***one***] ***of his followers*** (***shi'ah***) ***was Abraham*** (***37:83***)

... Thus he who was of his followers (***shi'ah***) ***implored him for help against him who was of his enemies....*** (***28:15***)

Therefore this name should delight you.' 22

What does this narration mean? 'His follower' (*shi'atih*) in the first verse refers to Prophet Noah's follower, and in the second verse it refers to Prophet Moses' follower.

'ALLAMAH. It apparently means that since the term '*shi'ah'* has been used in the Noble Qur'an and the idea of *tashayyu'* ('followership') has been attributed to the followers of Noah and Moses, thus it is a pleasant name, and it is a sign of blessing that you Shi'as are also called '*shi'ah'* (literally, 'follower').

So there is a nominal similarity between you 'followers' of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the 'followers' of Prophets Noah and Moses. And this in itself is a source of hope for your salvation and felicity. The name carries some sense of honour with itself.

Hurr al-'Amili: 'The Prophet's knowledge is inherited from the

previous prophets'

STUDENT. In the preface of the book, *Ithbat al-Hudah* ('Proof of the Guides'), Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili says,

And then it has also been repeatedly reported (*mutawatir*) that the Prophet (peace and be upon him and his family) has inherited his knowledge – partly or mostly – from the previous prophets and their successors.[23]

Is this true? How could it be, given that the Messenger of Allah apparently had no contact with the previous prophets and their successors so that he may ask them questions and benefit from their knowledge?

'ALLAMAH. It seems that the above claim is not true since there was no encounter between the Messenger of Allah and the previous prophets. Of course, it might be true from an esoteric point of view, that the Prophet got some of his knowledge from his predecessors by talking to them and asking questions inwardly (*batini*). And a verse in the Noble Qur'an bears witness to this:

And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before thee: did We ever set deities other than the All- Merciful to be worshipped? (***43:45***)

It is inferred from this verse that the Messenger of Allah had the means to speak to and ask questions from the prophets in the Divine Realm (*malakut*).

The universality of the resolute prophets (ulu al-'azm)

STUDENT. There are some verses in the Glorious Qur'an about the universality of the call (*da'wah*) of the Noble Messenger, Prophet Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (peace be upon him and his family) – that his call encompasses every human being until the Day of Resurrection. For example:

And We have not sent thee except as a bringer of good tidings and a warner for all people, but most people know not. (***34:28***)

And We sent thee not save as a mercy for everyone. (***21:107***)

...O mankind, truly I am the messenger of Allah to you all; [***of***] ***Him to Whom belongeth the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; there is no deity but Him; He gives life and death. So believe in Allah and His messenger, the unschooled prophet who believeth in Allah and His words, and follow him, haply you may be guided.*** (***7:158***)

Then how will it be when We bring a witness from every nation and We bring thee a witness against these? (***4:41***)

This is also proven by the fact that the Messenger of Allah reached out to all mankind in order to call them to Islam. He wrote letters to the kings of Rome, Persia, Ethiopia and the nations and tribes elsewhere. Hence, there is no doubt in the universality of his call, and it is evident like the sun at midday. But then there are other verses that may suggest that his call was specific to his own people. For example:

He is Who hath aroused amongst the unschooled a messenger of their own, to recite His revelations to them.… (***62:2***)

And for every nation there is a messenger; and when their messenger cometh, they will be justly judged between, and they will not be wronged. (***10:47***)

And We never sent a messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he may elucidate for them; thus Allah misguideth whomever He wills, and He guideth whomever He wills; and He is the All-Mighty, the All- Wise. (***14:4***)

These three verses are ambiguous about whether the message of the Prophet was confined to his own people or not. However, since the first four verses explicitly speak of the universality of his call, they clarify the ambiguity of the other verses.

Prophet Moses was sent to Pharaoh, a non-Israelite

STUDENT. But this might have been different concerning Prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon our prophet and his family and upon them). There are some verses in the Glorious Qur'an that seem to indicate that their calls were specific to the Children of Israel (Bani Isra'il). For example:

And truly We sent Moses with Our signs, that 'Bring forth thy people from the darkness to the light, and remind them of the days of Allah.' Lo! Surely therein are signs for every forbearing and grateful person. (***14:5***)

And [***recall***] ***when Moses said to his people, 'O my people, why do you persecute me, while you well know that I am truly the messenger of Allah to you?' Then when they deviated, Allah deviated their hearts; and Allah guideth not the people who are transgressors * And*** [***recall***] ***when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of Allah to you…'.*** (***61:5-6***)

And most evident of all is God's response to Prophet Jesus' mother, Hadrat Maryam (Honourable Mary):

She said, 'My Lord, how can I have a son when no mortal has touched me?' He said: So [***it will be***]***. Allah createth what He will. When He decreeth a thing, He only saith to it, 'Be' and it is * And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel * And a messenger to the Children of Israel.…*** (***3:47-9***)

Furthermore, when the Qur'an quotes Prophet Moses, his speeches are addressed to the Children of Israel.

Also, the *hajj* (pilgrimage) was not decreed as a ritual in the religions of either Prophets Moses or Jesus. Had they been universal, they should have followed Prophet Abraham's universal religion, which had prescribed the *hajj* (peace be upon them all).

If one studies the religions of these two great prophets, he realises that despite calling to the unity of Allah, Glorified and Exalted He is, they include certain rules that are completely foreign to Islam and the religion of Prophet Abraham.

'ALLAMAH. Your points and remarks are all true in their own right. But despite all that, there are certain verses and narrations, as well as historical evidence from the life of the Noble Prophet, which indicate that the message and call (*da'wah*) of these two great prophets were universal. For instance, it says in the Noble Qur'an,

Go both of you unto Pharaoh, [***for***] ***indeed he has transgressed.*** (***20:43***)

Prophet Moses promoted his religion to Pharaoh and his tribe (the Qibtis), who were certainly not among the Children of Israel (referred to as the Sibtis). In fact, 'Qibtis' is used as the opposite of 'Sibtis'.

Also, the Noble Messenger recognised the religions of the Arab Jews and Christians who were in Mecca, Medina, Ethiopia, and elsewhere as official religions. If the religions of prophets Moses and Jesus were specific to the Children of Israel, then adoption of these religions by the Arabs would have been wrong and should not have been endorsed by the Messenger of Allah.

One other piece of evidence is that the Noble Messenger was willing to do *mubahalah* with the Christians of Najran.[24] He challenged them to a mystical battle, even though they were also Arabs.

And even though the *hajj* was a tradition (*sunnah*) of Prophet Abraham, he decreed it only for Arabs and not for all of his followers. He did not prescribe the *hajj* for the inhabitants of Palestine. Otherwise, prophets such as Isaac, Jacob and the other Israelite prophets would have definitely performed this divine ritual. Nonetheless, the ritual was passed down to Prophet Ishmael (Isma'il) and his descendants, who resided in Arabia. And there is no evidence that the *hajj* was decreed or should have been decreed universally at the time of Prophet Abraham.

And regarding the verses that you mentioned, just because a prophet was sent to the Children of Israel did not necessarily mean that his message was only for them. The verse, ***'And We never sent a messenger save with the tongue of his people'*** (***14:4***) only establishes that every prophet speaks the language of his people, and that is different from saying that his call is exclusive to his people.

Attributing actions to the Supreme Truth; 'So that Allah may know who supporteth Him and His messengers unseen'

STUDENT. There are some verses in the Noble Qur'an that identify God, Sacred He is, as the Doer of the actions. Some of these verses are truly astonishing, such as:

And whoever maketh a breach with the Messenger, after the guidance hath been elucidated for him, and followeth other than the way of the believers, We turn him over to what he hath turned to, and We enter [***or burn***] ***him in hell – a miserable return.*** (***4:115***)

In this verse, God has identified Himself as the cause of diversion of those who oppose the Messenger of Allah and do not follow the way of the believers. What the verse means is that, 'About that person who diverted, It was We Who diverted him. That is why he diverted.' Another verse is:

O you who believe, take not the disbelievers as masters [***and friends***] ***in place of the believers. Do you want to give Allah a clear authority*** [***and proof***] ***against you?*** (***4:144***)

Truly whenever I, the lowest, think of the meaning of this noble verse, my amusement increases. Such a fine meaning, subtle content and comprehensive message! It is amazing how Allah, Glorified and Exalted He is, has forbidden the believers to befriend and affiliate with the infidels, and eventually take them as masters and superiors, while abandoning the believers. Then the verse regards the authority and dominance that the infidels acquire over this group of people – due to their wrong action (i.e. alliance with the infidels) – as Allah's authority and dominance. That is, the dominance and supremacy of the infidels over the Muslims is God's supremacy over them. So it is saying, 'O you Muslims! Do not do this, so that God does not do that.'

'ALLAMAH. The language of the Qur'an when talking about God's Unity of Actions (*al-tawhid al-af'ali*) and relating every action to the Supreme Truth is truly outstanding. In one occasion it says,

Then We raised them up, that We might know which of the two parties would better calculate the time they had tarried. (***18:12***)

It is clear that here, knowledge refers to objectified knowledge (*al-'ilm al-fi'li*), which is the appearance and realisation of particular beings before the Supreme Lord. There are many instances in the Glorious Qur'an where what is meant by God's knowledge ('*ilm*) is the actions of beings. For example:

… So that Allah may know who supporteth Him and His messengers unseen…. (***57:25***)

So that He may know they have conveyed the messages of their Lord…. (***72:28***)

One of the exegetes has given a good interpretation of what is meant by '*ilm* (knowing) here: that it means, 'So that what We knew would be disclosed as We knew it.'[25]

And never say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow' * But only 'If Allah wills'.... (***18:23–4***)

The above verse implies that God's decree and will includes the actions that a person does. And so does the verse,

And had We made him an angel, We surely would have made him a man, and confused for them what they confuse. (***6:9***)

All actions are subject to God's permission and decree

'ALLAMAH. In general, what the Glorious Qur'an teaches us is that whatever there is in the universe (*'alam al-wujud*), be it an existence (*dhat*), an action (*fi'l*) or an effect (*athar*), they all belong to God. 'He is One and there is no partner for Him' (*wahdahu la sharika lah*), and it is His decision to do whatever He wills with His 'belongings'.

Anything other than God has no choice or power whatsoever, except for what God bestows upon it, and only to the extent that He gives it power. God is the Absolute Owner of every being. He is the Absolute Owner of man and his possessions, and there are abundant verses in the Qur'an that signify this reality.

No being in the universe is self-reliant in its actions and effects (even though we consider these beings as causes and means). In their causality, they are not independent of the actions and effects of God, Exalted is He. They cannot do any action and cannot cause any effect save for the action and effect that God wills. That is, God grants them the power to do an action or cause an effect, and if He wills otherwise, the beings would lose the power to bring about that action and effect.

In other words, in itself, there is no system of causes and instruments (*asbab*) in the universe that can cause any effect. What a being does is done because God gives it the power for that action or effect, and because He does not will its opposite. That is to say, God facilitates and smoothes the path to that action or effect, and thereby permits it. God's permission (*idhn*) is His bestowal of power and removal of the impediments.

There are abundant verses and narrations that the action of any agent is conditional on God's permission, and that no doer does anything except by God's permission.[26] For example:

No affliction befalleth save by Allah's permission.... (***64:11***)

As for the good land, its vegetation cometh forth by the permission of its Lord.... (***7:58***)

And no soul may die except by Allah's permission.... (***3:145***)

Any palm-trees you cut down or left standing on their roots was thus by Allah's permission.... (***59:5***)

And We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by the permission of Allah…. (***4:64***)

Therefore it is incumbent on any person who has knowledge of his God to not regard himself self-reliant in his actions, and not consider himself independent of Allah. One should rather view himself as the doer of the action as a result of God's endowment, and capable of doing it by His power. Allah says,

… Truly power belongeth entirely to Allah…. (***2:165***)

Any believer that wants to commence on any action must do so by trust and reliance on Allah, and should lean on His support:

… So when thou art resolved then rely on Allah…. (***3:159***)

And when he wants to promise something or speak of the future, that 'I will do this and that,' he should condition it on God's permission and decree.

Allah attributes actions to people, but denies their independence

'ALLAMAH. Though the above is true, there is also no doubt that one's actions belong to himself. In many places in the Qur'an, Allah has attributed actions to the Prophet and the people, such as:

… Then say: for me is my deed, and for you is your deed…. (***10:41***)

… We have our deeds and you have your deeds…. (***42:15***)

At the same time, He denies the singularity of this attribution to the person who does it, and refutes the independence of the person from Allah's permission and decree.

So based on what was said, the exception in the verse,

And never say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow' * But only 'If Allah wills'…. (***18:23-4***)

only states the exception, but not what is excepted (*al-istithna' al-mufarragh*). It is implied that the exception includes all conditions or all times, and a conjunctive 'by' (*ba'*) should be assumed to connect the two verses. Hence, the meaning of the verse would be something like, 'And never say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow" at any time or any condition, unless you accompany it *by* saying, "If Allah wills".'

1. [Translator's note. In accordance with the author's argument, several meanings and interpretations have been put forward for many of the terms in these verses, and so the translations vary. Also, all these vows are to emphasise what follows in the following verses, about the hereafter.]
2. See Alusi, Ruh al-Ma'ani (Beirut, 198?), 30:280
3. Al-Mizan (Beirut, 1970), 14:81; 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir al-Qummi (Beirut 1387/1968), 2:410. [Translator's note. In addition to 83:1, the term wayl appears in several other occasions in the Qur'an.]
4. See Muhammad ibn Murtada (Mulla Muhsin) Fayd al-Kashani, Tafsir al-Safi (Tehran, 1416/1996), 1:31ff.
5. [Translator's note. The natural universal (al-kulli al-tabi'i) is a quiddity (mahiyyah) that 'possesses universality in the

mind and is capable of corresponding to a multiplicity of things' (whether mental or external). See 'Allamah Tabataba'i, The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics (London, 2003): 47; trans. A.Q. Qara'i.]

6. See Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983), 54:306ff.; Muhammad Salih Mazandarani, Sharh-i Usul al-Kafi (Beirut, 1421/2000), 4:193.

7. [Translator's note. See note 202 below.]

8. [Translator's note. Jami' is a being that is existentially superior to the other beings of its kind, called the individuals (afrad), such that the individuals are the manifestations of that superior being.]

9. The verse is: 'On the day when the Spirit (ruh) and the angels stand in ranks; they speak not save whoever is permitted by the All-Merciful and speaketh aright' (78:38). Maybe what 'Allamah meant was that the verse hints at a sense of authority for the Spirit (ruh) over the angels.

10. See Chapter 5: Mystical Discourses.

11. 'Allamah might have been referring to this verse: 'There are guards [angels] for him [every person] before and behind him, protecting him from Allah's command. Allah changeth not what a people are at until they change what is in themselves. And when Allah willeth misfortune for a people there is no turning it back, nor have they a guardian other than Him' (13:11). In this verse, the 'guards' and their 'protection from Allah's command' confirm the points of the discussion above.

12. Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Furu') (Tehran, 1388/1968), 3:235, which reports four narrations in this regard with similar meaning.

13. [Translator's note. The embodiment of deeds (tajassum al-a'mal) is the belief that one's reward or retribution in the hereafter consists of the manifestation and appearing of his actual deeds being repaid to him; however, the reality of the deeds will only be realised at that time.]

14. Part of a long hadith about the signs of the resurrection; see 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir al-Qummi (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:307; and al-Mizan, 5:396.

15. See Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mah (Qum, 1405/1984): 252 and 525ff.; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal (Beirut, 1409/1989), 14:282ff and 599ff.; See Ibn Majah Sunan Ibn Majah (Beirut, 1996), 4:396ff (Kitab Ta'bir al- Ru'ya); Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur (Beirut, 197?), 5:353ff.

16. See al-Mizan, 13:395.

17. See Ibn 'Asakir, Tarikh Madinat Dimashq (Beirut, 1995), 2:233; and Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Beirut, 1995), 16:29.

18. [Translator's note. He was none other than Toshihiko Izutsu.]

19. [Translator's note. Note that letters like y' and ' have a hamzah at the end, but it is not included in abjad calculations since it has the same number as the preceding alif.]

20. See al-Mizan, 1:75.

21. As 'Allamah explains later, it might be that the traversing (tayy al-ard) of less-than-perfect individuals is done through the perfect individuals. That is, whenever they want to traverse the earth, they can do so under the permission of a perfect person, who would appear right away and take them on tayy al-ard. Or he may take them to the desired destination merely by his will and without his appearance.

22. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983), 12:29; 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir al-Qummi (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:223; with its own line of transmission.

23. Hurr al-'Amili, Ithbat al-Hudah (Qum, 1959-60), 1:23.

24. [Translator's note. Mubahalah (mutual cursing) is when two parties pray to God to put the wrong party in curse and damnation. It is a gnostic combat whereby each party – which claims to be rightful – uses its spiritual connection with truth, which is the source of every power in the world, in order to put down the other side. Verse 3:61 is known is the Verse of Mubahalah, and Najran is a city in Yemen.]

25. Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan (Beirut, 1995), 6:315.

26. One must obey Allah's order because of Allah and because it is His order, not because of anything else. There are some short demonstrative arguments about this in al-Mizan, 8:26 that comprise a book of wisdom. It says, 'His word is the truth; and it is incumbent that His order is obeyed because it is His order, not because of any maslahah (expediency, welfare) or for any good or benefit that it involves. Otherwise that would dismiss God of His Lordship (rububiyyah) and

Mastership (mawlawiyyah), and would make considerations of expediencies and benefits central to everything. And since those considerations and benefits pertain to His creatures, that would set God on a par with the other things.'

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