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A Glimpse of Tafsir-e Nur: Verses 162-165 of Surah al-An'am

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Abstract

The Commentary of Light (Tafsir Nur) by Shaykh Muhsin Qara'ati is a written compilation of lectures over three decades of teaching. This commentary offers concise lessons from each verse of the Qur'an, featuring explanatory points and lessons; the explanatory points are brief itemized notes to help the readers attain a glossary understanding of the aforementioned verses, while the lessons delve deeper into the verse to illustrate a more thorough hermeneutic analysis of the concept. The verses chosen for this article are from the Chapter al-An'am – its theme about protesting against polytheism and inviting people towards monotheism. The following is an exegesis of verses 162 to 165 of this chapter.

Structure of Chapter al-An'am

The chapter al-An'am includes one hundred and sixty five verses, all of which were conveyed during a single revelation in Mecca. Alluding to the prominence of this chapter, according to historical traditions, Angel Gabriel, along with seventy thousand angels, revealed it to Prophet Muhammad.

The primary theme of this chapter is to protest against polytheism and invite people towards monotheism. During the Era of Ignorance (Jahiliyya)[1] and in the earlier days of the Prophetic mission of Muhammad, many polytheists had permitted the consumption of some four-legged animals, while prohibiting others. In response to the superstitious beliefs, God in the chapter An'am (namely verse 136 and onwards) clearly defines the rulings regarding the consumption of four-legged animals, hence the title An'am (The Cattle).

Many traditions have been narrated regarding the virtue of this chapter. It is said that anyone who recites a four-rak'at prayer[2] followed by this chapter and then supplicates, will be granted one's wishes."[3] Another important point to note is that this chapter mentions the word قُل *"Say"* more than any other chapter. It may be that this term has been addressed 44 times to the Prophet because it was necessary that he demonstrate his certainty against invalid beliefs, superstitions, and unwarranted expectations of the polytheists mentioned in this chapter, and that the Prophet was responsible to relay the revealed text without any deviations or personal biases – and an unadulterated Divine Word of Allah.

In what follows, we refer to the exegesis of the verses 162 to 165 of this chapter.

Verses 162-163

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّـهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ ۖ وَبِذَٰلِكَ

أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

Say, 'Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no partner, and this [***creed***] ***I have been commanded*** [***to follow***]***, and I am the first of those who submit*** [***to Allah***]***.'*** (***6: 162-163***)

Explanatory Points

- It has been narrated that the Prophet would recite these verses at the beginning of his prayer before reciting Surat al-Hamd.[4]

- Death encompasses life, life encompasses rites of worship, and rites of worship encompass prayer. Therefore, prayer is the center within worship.

- Islam means to surrender before the command of Allah and all the Prophets have been included in this command.

1) Prophet Nuh considered himself a Muslim – one who submits:

"I have been commanded to be of those who submit ***to Allah."*** [5]

Someone who submits to Allah's will is called a Muslim, hence Prophet Nuh's self-attribution as a Muslim.

2) Prophet Ibrahim asked Allah to make himself and his children submissive to Him:

"***Make us submissive to You, and*** ***raise*** [***from our progeny a nation submissive to You.***" [6]

3) Prophet Yusuf asked Allah to let him die a Muslim.

"Let my death be in submission*] *to You."[7]

4) The Prophet of Islam is considered the first Muslim: ***"...and I am the first of those who submit* [*to Allah*]*."*** To be the "first" signifies that he either was the first to submit for his time or had the highest level of surrender over all others.

Lessons

1) Clearly and with pride announce your path, method, and goal in opposition to deviant paths. قُل "Say" The initial "Say," in its command form, enhances the sense of conviction underlying the subsequent statement.

2) Prayer is a part of worship but it is mentioned separately to show its importance:

"...my prayer and my worship..."

3) Sincere believers take their providential path (the road of life and death) and their legislative path (prayer and worship) only for Allah, Lord of the worlds.

إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّـهِ

"Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds."

4) In the same way a person seeks nearness to Allah through prayer, an intention can also be made for every breath one takes. Living and dying may also be for the intention of nearness to Allah.

مَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّـهِ

"My life and my death are for the sake of Allah."

5) Life and death are not inherently important; what is important is that each should be used in the way of Allah.

مَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّـهِ

"My life and my death are for the sake of Allah."

6) That which is for Allah will be nurtured.

لِلَّـهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

"For the sake of Allah, the Lord of all the worlds."

The title 'Lord' (one who nurtures physically and spiritually) has been chosen for this verse; thus, one who prays, worships, lives, and dies for Allah's sake will be responded to by Allah's Lordship.

7) Life and death are not within our hands but one may determine the direction one takes.

"For the sake of Allah."

8) Sincerity in our actions is Allah's command.

بِذَٰلِكَ أُمِرْتُ

"I have been commanded* [*to follow*]*."

It is Allah's wish that we be sincere in our actions, such as the Prophet has been commanded to be.

9) A leader must pioneer obedience of Allah's commands.

أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

"And I am the first of those who submit* [*to Allah*]*."

Since the Prophet is a spiritual leader, he must lead by example.

Verse 164

قُلْ أَغَيْرَ اللَّـهِ أَبْغِي رَبًّا وَهُوَ رَبُّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۚ وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا ۚ وَلَا

تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُم مَّرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ

تَخْتَلِفُونَ

Say, 'Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?' No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your

return, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ. (***6:164***)

Explanatory Points

– The fact that no one shall carry the sins of another conveys Allah's justice in retribution, a point also mentioned in the scriptures revealed to Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Musa.

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّىٰ أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

Has he not been informed of what is in the scriptures of Moses, and of Abraham, who fulfilled his summons that no bearer shall bear another's burden?[8]

– Question: If no one is responsible for the other's sins, then why does the Qur'an mention that corrupt leaders will be responsible for the sins of their followers?

لِيَحْمِلُوا أَوْزَارَهُمْ كَامِلَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۙ وَمِنْ أَوْزَارِ الَّذِينَ يُضِلُّونَهُم بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۗ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَزِرُونَ

That they may bear their entire burdens on the Day of Resurrection, along with some of the burdens of those whom they lead astray without any knowledge (***that they will be carrying this weight***).[9]

Answer: Corrupt leaders are the cause of others becoming deviant and as a result, they are responsible for the sin of leading others astray.

– It has been narrated that a pregnant woman was brought to court before Umar and ordered to be stoned to death for committing adultery. Imam 'Ali said, "What is the sin of the baby in the mother's womb?" Then he recited the following verse:

لَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

"No bearer shall bear another's burden."[10]

Lessons

1) One must firmly stand by the truth when dealing with infidels and those who deny the truth:

قُلْ أَغَيْرَ اللَّـهِ

"Say, Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah?"

2) An active conscience is the best reply to internal questions:

"Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah?"[11]

3) Allah is the Lord of all existence and thus He is also my Lord:

وَهُوَ رَبُّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

"He is the Lord of all things."

4) Infidelity, polytheism, or corruption do not cause any harm to Allah. In fact these are the cause of man's own downfall:

وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا

"No soul does evil except against itself."

5) In the presence of Allah, every man is responsible for his own deeds:

لَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

"No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden."

6) To judge about people and their actions is the job of God:

ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُم مَّرْجِعُكُمْ

"Then to your Lord will be your return."

7) The world, too, has an end:

"Then to your Lord will be your return, and finally the stubborn ones will realize the truth of what they opposed."

Verse 165

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

"It is He who has made you successors on the earth, and raised some of you in rank above others so that He may test you in respect to what He has given you. Indeed your Lord is swift in retribution, and indeed He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful."

Explanatory Points

- The Chapter al-An'am began with the praise of Allah and ends with Allah's mercy.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّـهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

All praise is for Allah who created...

...and indeed He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

- *"Successors on the earth"* refers to either the representatives of Allah on the earth or the successors of the previous nations.

Lessons

1) Man is the successor [representative] of Allah and the commander of the earth; he is not a prisoner to the universe: 12

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ

It is He who has made you successors on the earth.

2) Differences among human beings and Allah's tests are part of His wisdom to teach and train each man. He teaches us because He is our Lord:

رَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ...وَهُوَ رَبُّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

And He is the Lord of all things... and He raised some of you in rank above others...

The differences and advantages among people are not a criterion for superiority, but a means of testing:

لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

So that He may test you in respect to what He has given you.

3) All that we possess is from Allah:

فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

What He has given you.

4) The criteria and scale of Allah's test are according to how much Allah has given and one's own capability:

لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

So that He may test you in respect to what He has given you.

5) After testing, Allah is swift in retribution towards to those who doubt:

سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ... لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيم

And He is all-forgiving, all-merciful towards those He has accepted.

6) Fear and hope must be alongside one another:

سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ... لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيم

Allah is swift in retribution...He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

1. Literally meaning ignorance, commonly referring to pre-Islamic Arabia
2. In two sets of two rak'ats
3. Tayyib, Sayed 'Abd Al-Husayn, Atyab al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, vol. 5, p. 2
4. Qurttabi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, Al-Jami' li--Ahkam al-Qur'an, vol. 7, p. 153.
5. أُمِرْتُ أَنَ أَكونَ مِن المُسلِمينَ, 10:72
6. 2:128.
7. 12: 101
8. 53:36-38
9. 16:25
10. 17:15.
11. If pure enough ones innate nature, fitrat, can answer many internal questions. Trans.
12. The universe was made for man to use and reach his perfection. Trans.

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