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Lesson Six: Scientific Indications of Resurrection

One of the valuable benefits that have been derived from the ceaseless progress of experimental science is that it has proven the possibility of the man's restoration to life. The advancement of human knowledge has, in fact, opened up a very interesting area of exploration in this respect, placing the matter in a new light and making it possible to examine it with precision for the very first time.

This achievement contributes significantly to an improved understanding of the topic, and it appears, moreover, that scientific investigations of the matter are advancing toward still more highly developed theories. The broader the scope of science becomes, the fewer ambiguities and obscurities will remain in this area.

When early materialist scholars discussed the question of resurrection, they regarded a return to life as impossible, and were therefore unable to treat resurrection as a topic worthy of scientific discussion.

The first change that occurred as a result of continuing scientific investigations of the matter was brought about by Lavoisier, the celebrated French scholar and founder of modern chemistry. He refuted previous theories and brought their dominance to an end, because in the course of the researches to which he devoted the major part of his life he reached the conclusion that the total quantity and mass of matter in the world are stable, subject to neither decrease nor increase.

The discovery of radioactivity and the transformation of matter into energy, the second important advance that was achieved in this area, caused Lavoisier's law to be modified, but it has retained its validity as far as the permanence of matter and energy is concerned.

Despite the chemical action and reaction which take place in the matter of which the world is composed, causing it to change its form and shape, no element of matter is ever buried in the cemetery of annihilation. What we see and perceive is a collection of various beings possessing mutable qualities. Thus the theory of the indestructibility of being came to replace the previous law and to explain fully all

the changes and transformations that take place in matter.

A drop of water that falls on the ground and is absorbed; the smoke of a cigarette that rises in the air; the various fuels that are consumed by industrial machinery; the flame that arises from burning dry wood; the candle that burns, scattering its particles in the air none of this is utterly lost and destroyed. If we had the means of reassembling their component parts we would obtain the same original materials, without the slightest decrease. It is only our superficial way of viewing things, our limited and inadequate way of thinking, that makes us imagine all these things disappear.

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Man's body is formed of clay, and after passing beneath the wheels of change and transformation it changes back into clay; i.e., it returns to its original form. This is because the body carries within it receptivity to change within it, but its existential core never tends to non-being as a result of these changes. It loses only the particular nature of its composition, like all other bodies, without ever sacrificing anything of its essence.

Similarly, the dead and lifeless form of man is transformed into clay, through the working of internal and external factors; it turns this way and that, each time assuming a new form. For example, in the course of time, a plant may grow from the soil where a person is buried and be eaten by an animal, contributing to its growth. Thus variety has been introduced into the matter of which man's body is composed, but the substance and content of his body remain firm and indestructible throughout all the changes that may occur.

The different forms taken on by our energy, good and bad deeds are likewise imbued with stability and permanence; they are preserved in the archives of the universe as the determining factor in our ultimate fate, whether it be good or evil, eternal happiness or permanent torment. We are obliged to submit to the consequences of our deeds.

The efforts of researchers to capture the sound waves emitted by men of the past have enjoyed some success; to a limited degree and with the aid of special equipment they have been able to recapture the sound waves emitted by the makers of tools, imprinted on the surface of those tools by the radiation of their hands.

These scientific accomplishments are in themselves an indication of the reality of resurrection; they provide a method which joined together with reflection may permit us to understand resurrection and prove it scientifically.

Quite apart from all the foregoing, we may ask why God should not be able to recreate the form of man which came into being out of scattered particles of clay and was then again turned into earth. The Qur'an makes repeated reference to this matter, saying for example:

"We created you from earth and return you to earth, and then bring you forth from it once more" **(20:55)**.

In this verse, our attention is drawn to the creative power of the Maker. Through the presentation of the past and future of man in this world and the hereafter in a single panorama, solace and assurance are given to man's unquiet and skeptical soul. The thought of man being swallowed up in death is shown to be irrational, and to speak of the changes and transformations that man undergoes as aimless is demonstrated to be absurd.

Life in the narrow sphere of this world is too petty to represent the ultimate aim of creation. If we take into consideration the total picture of creation, we will see that this petty realm taken in isolation is unworthy of the lofty origins from which it sprang.

Addressing those incredulous people who imagine that the body of man dissolves and disappears as a result of chemical actions and reactions within the soil and that it cannot be restored to life, the Qur'an says:

"The unbelievers say: `Is this not a strange thing that we should be brought back after dying and turning to dust? Such a return is impossible.' But We are fully aware of what the earth takes from them, and it is We Who possess the Preserved Tablet" **(50:2-4)**.

This verse refers, then, to a group of unbelievers who deny the resurrection of the dead. It reminds them that God knows full well where the elements are that once made up their bodies before being dispersed and returned to the storehouse of nature. He will reassemble those elements on the plain of resurrection, thus reconstructing the body in a way the unbelievers thought impossible. This reconstruction will follow entirely the structure and contents of the body as it previously existed and be based entirely upon it.

The Persuasive Logic of the Qur'an

When the Prophet of Islam, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, expounded the topic of resurrection to the pagan Arabs, a Bedouin by the name of Ubayy b. Khalaf picked up a decayed bone and set out for Medina to visit the Prophet. In the hope of refuting the arguments of the Prophet and the logic of the Qur'an on which they were based, he raised up the bone, as if it were a valuable and convincing piece of evidence, and crumbled it to dust, scattering the pieces in the air. Then, he addressed to the Prophet these crude, unadorned words, inspired by his rebelliousness and ignorance:

"Who will restore to life the scattered particles of this rotten bone?"

He believed that he would thus be able to refute the arguments of the Prophet and to destroy the belief of others in resurrection of the dead. His ignorant mode of thought prevented him from having any correct notion of the creation of being so that he imagined that the scattered particles of a decayed bone could not possibly be brought back to life. He obstinately maintained that the reassembling of the

countless particles of the body was unacceptable to man's reason.

The Qur'an replied with this convincing argument based on persuasive logic:

"(O Messenger,) say: `God Who first brought them to life will restore them to life. He has knowledge of all His creation.' ... Is the Creator Who brought into being the heavens and the earth incapable of creating the like thereof? Certainly He is the Creator and All-Knowing" **(36:79, 81)**.

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The Qur'an invites man to contemplate, the whole vast structure of creation, together with the innumerable phenomena and minutiae it contains, using his wisdom and intelligence which are his means for recognizing the principles underlying the universe. Such reflection will enable him to realize that the restoration of life to man through resurrection is not more difficult than the initial creation out of a mass of different materials that were compounded together.

It is thought and reflection that lead to correct comprehension; they form the method by which man must acquire a true understanding of the world in which he lives and they confirm, in a logical and profound fashion, the concepts he holds. The Qur'an stresses the importance of resurrection as follows:

"Were We weakened by bringing forth creation the first time that We should now be incapable of restoring it to life through resurrection?" **(50:15)**.

The Qur'an wishes man to realize that although the restoration of life to the dead appears impossible when measured against the capacities of man, it is something straightforward when measured against the infinite power of God Who first inhaled life in the inanimate form of man.

Man may well ask himself how the breath of life may be inhaled anew into the particles of his body once they have been scattered in the recesses of the earth, and how lifeless matter may be brought back to life although its constituent elements have been dispersed.

But that dispersal does not result in their permanent alienation from each other, and the human intellect can well understand that the infinite and eternal creative power of God has no difficulty in compounding anew those scattered elements so that they begin pulsating with life anew.

The Noble Qur'an reminds man of God's unlimited ability to restore all the minute qualities and precise details of man's limbs with the following words:

"Does man imagine that We are not capable of reassembling his decayed bones? We are able even to restore his fingers to their previous state" **(75:34)**.

This verse stresses that God is able not only to reassemble the bones of the dead and restore them to life but even, through His boundless and incomparable might, to gather together the scattered particles

of their beings and resurrect them.

When the power of God begins to restore to life the order of man's being, in order to implement the ultimate purpose of all being, His infinite power encounters no difficulty in bringing back even the detailed physical characteristics of man, in just the same way that He effortlessly caused the rays of life first to shine on the vast and as yet inanimate plain of being.

In the verse that we have just cited God selects for mention out of all the marvels of man's composition the lines in his fingers as an example of His power. This is significant, because it is possible that individuals should roughly resemble each other with respect to their other limbs, but in the whole world two people cannot be found with exactly identical fingerprints.

Sensory and empirical awareness teaches us that throughout all the changes we undergo in life and all the quantitative transformations to which our bodily composition is subject, the lines in our fingers remain stable and unchanging. This is completely at variance with the continuous changes that occur in our bodily condition.

If the skin on our hands is removed, for some accidental reason, a new skin grows in its place with exactly the same features. Those who specialize in these matters know that fingerprints are therefore the best means for establishing the identity of a person. Throughout the world police have recourse to fingerprints as the surest way for establishing the identity of the author of a crime. This unique quality of fingerprints, first indicated in the Qur'an, remained otherwise unknown until discovered in 1884 by some British scientists.

Anyone whose mind is oriented to truth and reality will understand, without any hesitation, that the powerful hand of God is at work in the appearance of all these wonders; no intelligent person can accept that some blind mechanical force should be capable of creating the precise and miraculous phenomenon that is man.

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