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Section 6: The People of the Rock

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 80 - 81

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أَصْحَابُ الْحِجْرِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

وءَاتَيْنَاهُمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فَكَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ

80. "And indeed the inhabitants of Hijr (also) rejected the messengers."
81. "And We presented Our signs to them, but they turned away from them."

The Arabic word 'Al-Hijr' is the name of a town in which the nation of Thamud used to live. It also generally refers to a dwelling place as well. The term /hijr/ also refers to the lap of the mother and Arabic phrase Hijr-i-'Ism a'il and /hujrah/ are the derivatives of the same word. 1

Thus, the name of this Surah has been taken from this verse.

The verse says:

"And indeed the inhabitants of Hijr (also) rejected the messengers."

One can conclude from the Qur'anic term /mursalin/ (messengers) that 'the inhabitants of Hijr' had also some prophets other than Hadrat-i-Salih. Some commentators say as the rejection of one prophet is, in fact, the rejection of all prophets, hence the term /mursalin/ has been mentioned here in this verse.

Anyway, the Qur'an continues regarding 'the inhabitants of Hijr' by saying:

"And We presented Our signs to them, but they turned away from them."

The application of the sense ‘turning away’ in this verse indicates that they were not even ready to listen to the verses of Allah or to look at them.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 82 - 84

وَكَانُوا يَنْحِتُونَ مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتاً ءَامِنِينَ

فَاَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّيْحَةُ مُصْبِحِينَ

فَمَآ أَغْنَي عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

82. “And they used to hew secure houses in the mountains.”
83. “So the (violent) blast overtook them in the morning.”
84. “And what they used to earn did not avail them.”

Those people were quite heedless of theological issues and of religious matters, and paid no attention to such things. On the contrary, regarding their worldly life and livelihood, they were so earnest that they maximized the security of their houses by building and setting them up through cutting stones and rocks within the mountains.

The verse says:

“And they used to hew secure houses in the mountains.”

It is astonishing that man maximized the security and whatever belongs to his fleeting worldly life so much, while he is extremely so negligent for his eternal and immortal life in the Hereafter that he sometimes is not even ready to listen to Allah’s speech and is not predisposed to even to glance at His signs of communication.

After all, what can one expect from such a people? Expect for the ‘Divine law of the survival of the fittest’ and except for the abstinence from providing the right of continuing with one’s life for those nations who are entirely corrupt and incite corruption. An exterminating catastrophe must be inflicted upon them and annihilate them altogether.

Therefore, the Holy Qur’an asserts:

"So the (violent) blast overtook them in the morning."

This blast was a death threatening thunderbolt which came down upon their houses and annihilated them. While they were inside those secured built houses.

The verse says:

"And what they used to earn did not avail them."

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 85 - 86

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالاَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِلاَّ بِالْحَقِّ وإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لاَتِيَةٌ فَاصْفَحِ الصَّفْحَ الْجَمِيلَ

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ الْخَلاَّقُ الْعَلِيمُ

85. "And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them two but with truth; and verily the Hour (of resurrection) is surely coming; then pardon you, with a gracious pardoning."
86. "Verily your Lord, He is the Creator, the All-Knowing."

The Arabic term /safh/ is derived from /safhah/ which means 'face'. The Arabic phrase /fasfah-is-safh/ signifies 'turning one's face away from someone but not out of one's outrage but to do that for forgiving and overlooking in case of one's compassion and out of one's affections'.

Imam Rida (as) has commented upon the Qur'anic phrase /safh-in-jamil/ as 'forgiving without inquisition, or with no taking to task'.

As man's everlasting troubles and entanglements have their roots in his lack of ideology and correct system of beliefs and, briefly speaking, in his disbelief in the origin of existence and in the Resurrection Day, the Qur'an returns to the issues of 'monotheism' and of 'resurrection' after describing the situation of nations such as the people of Lot and the people of Shu'ayb and that of Salih, those who were entangled in all of those afflictions.

It has referred to the issues of monotheism and resurrection both in a single verse, saying:

"And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them two but with truth..."

This, He has said about monotheism; then He proclaims in connection with resurrection that everybody will be given his reward therein.

The verse says:

"...and verily the Hour (of resurrection) is surely coming..."

In pursuit of this goal, He commands His prophet to be lenient towards them when facing their obstinacies, ignorance, fanaticism, meddling and their intensive oppositions, and to overlook their sins and forgive them with a beautiful forgiveness which is not even coupled with any blame.

As you will not be in any need or require any violence in spite of the fact that you have got clear evidence for your call and messengership to which you are given mission to accomplish. Moreover, violence against the ignorant people will usually lead to further violence and their further fanatic behavior. Therefore, leniency and forgiveness is the best.

The verse continues saying:

"...then pardon you, with a gracious pardoning."

In the end, in the following verse the Qur'an proclaims that He Who commands as to the forgiving, is the Lord Who is Educator, creative, and knowing.

He is aware that amnesty and forgiveness have a very great impact on the soul of the individuals and of the society, and have a tremendous impact on the attraction as well as on the development of the people. Therefore, putting into practice the commandment of /safh/ (remittal) should not appear as a burden to you.

It says:

"Verily your Lord, He is the Creator, the All-Knowing."

Surah Al-Hijr – Verse 87

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعاً مِنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْءَانَ الْعَظِيمَ

87. "And indeed We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) (Surah Al-Hamd) and the Grand Qur'an."

The Islamic quotations narrated by both Shi'ite and Sunni scholars indicate that the objective of the Qur'anic phrase /sab'an minal- ma ani/ (seven of the oft-repeated (verses)) is Surah Al-Hamd.

For this Surah is to be recited twice in every prayer, and it has been twice revealed. There has been mentioned in a quotation that Allah (s.w.t.) says He has separated Surah Al-Hamd into two parts between Himself and His servants. One part is in connection with Him, while the other part concerns His servants.

From the holy phrase /bismillah/ as far as /malik i yaumiddin/ is in connection with Allah, and from /'iyy aka na'bud/, which is the expression of obedience in worshipping, seeking assistance, and invocation, relates to the servants.

Also, some have claimed that the objective in mind in /ma ani/ is the Qur'an itself. In this case, the above mentioned Qur'anic phrase means 'seven verses from the Qur'an' which is necessarily the same Surah Al-Hamd.

The reason for this idea is the verse which says:

"Allah has revealed the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself (***yet***) ***repeating..."***2

The Book the verses of which are similar, harmonious and repetitive.

The blissful Prophet (S) proclaimed:

"Whoever, upon whom Allah bestows the Qur'an, imagines such that another one has been bestowed something better than that, he has downgraded the magnificent (*Qur'an*) *and has magnified a tiny* (*thing*)*."*3

Anyway, Allah seeks to condole the Prophet (S) not to be terrified by the enemy's violence, their density of population and the immense capabilities which are at their disposal, for Allah has made some blessings available to him with which nothing will match equally.

The verse says:

"And indeed We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (***verses***) (***Surah Al-Hamd***) ***and the Grand Qur'an."***

Allah explains to His Prophet (S) this reality that he possesses a great capital, a capital such as the Qur'an which is as great as the entire world of existence, in particular, the Surah Al-Hamd which embodies such magnificent content that it joins man with Allah instantly and makes his soul bow and submit before Him, as well as invoking Him for help.

In Tafsir-i-Borhan, under this noble verse there is cited a quotation from Imam Muhammad-i-Baqir (as) who said: We are the objective of /ma ani/ which Allah has bestowed on our prophet, and we are Allah's countenance on the earth known among the people and the Shi'ah followers.

He who has known us, he is certain to believe in the origin of existence, resurrection and paradise, and he who is ignorant as regards us, he will surely face the Hell and Divine chastisement.

Explanations

Legislation is solely the prerogative of the Creator, and the laws of religious edicts must be based on 'creation'.

The principle of repetition in educational issues is a fundamental matter.

The word 'Oft-repeated' refers to the repetition of the revelation of the verses, the repetition of words, the repetition of stories, the repetition of Divine attributes, the repetition of verses of chastisement and of resurrection, the repetition of the fate of nations, the repetition of Divine blessings, the repetition of commandments, and the repetition of reciting the Qur'an.

Surah Al-Hamd is equivalent with the Qur'an, though the number of its verses amounts to seven.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verse 88

لاَ تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَي مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجاً مِّنْهُمْ وَلاَ تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَاخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

88. "(O' prophet!) Do not strain your eyes after what we have given certain classes of them to enjoy, and do not grieve for them, and lower your wing (of affection) unto the believers."

Warnings always do not follow the course of action. Rather, they sometimes precede and form as warning and preventive measures. The blissful Prophet (S) was never interested in the world of the unbelievers. Hence, Allah's dissuasion signifies warnings and serves as such, which causes dissuasion among other believers so as not to focus their eyes on the world of the pagans.

The blissful Prophet (S) has stated:

"He who focuses on what others hold or possess, his troubles increase and his distress will not be treated." 4

One of the strict recommendations of the Qur'an to the Prophet (S) and the believers consists of recommendation as to leniency, mercifulness, and patience towards the faithful believers, among which one may name the instance when they should be patience with those who always call on their Lord and be modest and affectionate unto the believers.

Incidentally, the Arabic word /'azwaj/ includes both men and women. Some claim that this word means /'asn af/ (classes). That is, do not focus on the blessings which we have provided the classes of pagans with and do not consider them great while thinking about them.

For, the blessings which We have bestowed upon you and your followers, namely, your prophetic mission, the Qur'an, Islam, the conquest etc, are so far more in quantity and worth that they exceed all their blessings.

The verse says:

"(O' prophet!) Do not strain your eyes after what we have given certain classes of them to enjoy..."

And if the Quraysh pagans do not become believers and, as a consequence, will receive chastisement, do not grieve for them.

The verse continues saying:

"...and do not grieve for them..."

At the end of the verse, He issues His third command to the prophet about modesty, humbleness, and leniency towards those who are believers, when He says:

"...and lower your wing (of affection) unto the believers."

This sense is a beautiful ambiguous metaphorical allusion to modesty, affection, and friendliness as in the case of birds when they want to show their affection towards their chickens they cover them under their wings, where they provide us with the most existing emotional scene as they try to protect them against all sorts of accidents and enemies.

Therefore, all these are intended to show that leaders and prophets must be modest and humble with regard to the believers so that they follow him.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 89 - 91

وَقُلْ إِنِّي أَنَا النَّذِيرُ الْمُبِينُ

كَمَآ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَي الْمُقْتَسِمِينَ

الَّذِينَ جَعَلُوا الْقُرْءَانَ عِضِينَ

89. "And say: 'Verily I am the manifest Warner'."
90. "(We shall send them chastisement) as We sent down on the dividers."
91. "Those who made the Qur'an into shreds."

Similar to the case that leniency and affection with the believers and friends are necessary, being decisive against the opponents is also required, and decisiveness, threats and warnings are a necessity when one faces paganism.

Allah commanded the Prophet (S) to say if he warns them Allah has asserted the fact that He will send them that kind of chastisement which was sent to 'those who divided', the same ones who divided the Qur'an and the Divine verses into acceptable and none acceptable parts.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"And say: 'Verily I am the manifest Warner'."

"(We shall send them chastisement) as We sent down on the dividers."

They took up the Qur'an and accepted from it whatever was to their advantage and discarded whatever was to their disadvantage. But the true believers do not impose any kind of analysis, divisions or discrimination as regards the Divine commandments.

The verse says:

"Those who made the Qur'an into shreds."

There are three meanings mentioned in the commentaries for the Qur'anic term /muqtasimin/:

There were some chiefs of the unbelievers who during the days of Hajj pilgrimage used to divide forces at the crossroads and entrance gates of Mecca in order to tell the travelers that a person called Muhammad (S) has got certain claims and they should not listen to him. They introduced him as a soothsayer, a sorcerer, and a lunatic.

The second meaning points to those who divided the Holy Qur'an among themselves so as to produce each a simulation form of the Qur'an.

The third meaning refers to those persons who took certain parts of the Qur'an for practice while leaving the other parts as unpractical.

The Arabic word /'idin/ is either the plural of /'idah/ in the sense of 'quarrel and disputation', or it is derived from the word /'udw/ which means 'cutting into pieces'.

Incidentally, the retribution of those who divide the Holy Book in that form is the Divine punishment. A believer is the one who accepts the Qur'an in its entirely, saying that whatever has been revealed has come from the side of Allah.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 92 - 93

فَوَرَبِّكَ لَنَسْأَلَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

92. "So, by your Lord, We shall surely question them all (in the Hereafter),"
93. "As to what they used to do."

Following their state of unbelief as to the Qur'an and their dividing it, the Qur'an implies that they shall see the punishment for this evil act of theirs and will be questioned about it.

O' Mohammad (S) by your Lord We shall question them about it and We mean by interrogating them warning and blaming of them, that is, to convey to them this message as to why they committed sin. What proofs have they got to offer for having committed sins? They will then be target of all scandals.

The Qur'an says:

"So, by your Lord, We shall surely question them all (in the Hereafter),"

In this verse, Allah swears to Himself, presenting Himself as the Lord of Muhammad so as to prove his splendid position to the people.

Then it continues saying:

"As to what they used to do."

Incidentally, the subject in question in this verse is: We ask them what they worshipped and what answer they would have to offer the prophets! They will have no answer!

And in general, the fact that attention is focused on interrogation and auditing of accounts in resurrection day and the fact that everybody is going to be asked questions regarding everything is itself one of the factors in the awakening process.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 94 - 96

فَاصْدَعْ بِمَا تُؤْمَرُ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

إِنَّا كَفَيْنَاكَ الْمُسْتَهْزِئِينَ

الَّذِينَ يَجْعَلُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهاً ءَاخَرَ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ

94. "Therefore, declare openly what you are bidden and turn you away from the polytheists."
95. "Verily We will suffice you against the scoffers,"
96. "Those who set up another god with Allah, so they will soon know (the truth)."

The Arabic term /sad'/ signifies splitting and exposing or exhibiting.

The blissful Prophet (S) engaged in propagation for three years in secret, and as the Qur'anic clause:

"***Therefore, declare openly what you are bidden***"

was revealed, he openly went on his invitation and he told the people if they accepted his call, their administrative government, and the splendor of this world and the world hereafter would be all theirs.

The verse says:

"Therefore, declare openly what you are bidden and turn you away from the polytheists."

However, they decided to be engaged in ridiculing and mocking that Divine Prophet and went to Abۥ-Talib , the uncle of the Prophet (S), to present their complaint.

They complained that Muhammad was seducing their youths. If Muhammad was after wealth, wife and high position, they were ready to provide him with them all. The Prophet (S) told his uncle:

"Dear uncle! My words are the Divine messages and I shall never give up preaching."

The pagans requested Abu-Talib to surrender Muhammad to them, but he did not condescend to the request. 5

Anyway, Allah issues a decisive decree to the Prophet (S) in this noble verse, implying: you are here by

instruction not only to stop letting any weakness, fear and numbness overtake you when facing the fuss and ado of the pagans, but you are also advised to openly declare your mission and what you are up to do, revealing the facts of the religion explicitly and turn away from the polytheists and remain headless with regard to them.

Afterwards, to provide reinforcement for the heart of the Prophet (S), Allah reassures him that He will back him up as against those who ridicule him. Allah implies: We shall remove the evil of those who ridicule you and We shall perish them.

The verse says:

"Verily We will suffice you against the scoffers,"

Allah then describes /mustahzi'in/ (those who ridicule), as: They are the ones who designate counterparts for Allah, but they will soon face the consequence of their evil behavior.

The verse says:

"Those who set up another god with Allah, so they will soon know (the truth)."

It may be that this meaning alludes to the fact that these are the ones whose thoughts and deeds are ridiculous by themselves, for they are so ignorant that they create god-like figures out of stones and wood as against Allah Who is the Creator of the world of existence, despite all of which they want to make an object of ridicule out of you.

Surah Al-Hijr – Verses 97 - 99

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

وَاعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّي يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

97. "And (O' prophet!) We certainly know your breast is straitened by what they say."
98. "Therefore, (to reinforce yourself), celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who make prostration (unto Him)."

99. "And worship your Lord until the Certain comes to you."

Among the commentators it is well-known that the aim in mentioning /yaqin/ (certainty), in these verses, is the most certain of all that takes place with regard to man, that is, death. As it is also quoted from the tongue of the pagans in verses 46-47 of Surah Al-Muddaththir No. 74 saying that they used to reject the Day of Judgment till death overtook them.

The meaning of the Arabic word /yaqin/ is not death, of course, but death prepares the grounds for arriving at certainty, for at the time when death is forth coming, all curtains are drawn and man becomes certain of the realities.

Some deviants have made a pretext out of the verse and claim: if one arrives at the state of certainty, there is no more any need for worshipping, little knowing that it is the Prophet (S) who is being addressed and who had arrived at certainty from the earliest day and used to declare in face of inciting greed and threats of the pagans:

"If you place the moon into my one hand and the sun into another one, I shall not be stopped from performing my duty."

However, despite such a state of certainty, he used to worship till the last moments of his life.

Anyway, Allah adds as a console and as a reinforcement for elevating the spirit of the holy Prophet (S) in the noble verse:

"And (O' prophet!) We certainly know your breast is straitened by what they say."

Your delicate spirit and your very sensitive heart cannot withstand all those ill-intentioned words and blasphemous sentences, thus making you deeply depressed.

However, do not be disturbed; to remove the ill-effects of their nasty and inappropriate words, worship and praise your Lord, and remain one of those who prostrate.

The verse says:

"Therefore, (to reinforce yourself), celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who make prostration (unto Him)."

For, such a gratitude shown towards Allah will remove the ill-effects of their words from the minds of the lovers of Allah. Moreover, it provides you with energy, ability, illumination and sincerity as well.

Some Islamic traditions denote that whenever the Prophet (S) became sad, he used to establish prayer by which he would wipe out the effects of that grief from his mind.

Therefore, The Lord gives him His last commandment in connection with this matter that he must not

give up worshipping Allah throughout his life and he (S) must keep on worshipping and serving Him till his certain death occurs.

The holy verse says:

"And worship your Lord until the Certain comes to you."

It is cited in Majma'-ul-Bayan that if Allah would say only: 'worship the Lord' and would not confine it to a certain limit in time, it was sufficient for man to worship Allah once and prove his servitude to Him. However, with this meaning, He convinces man to worship Allah as long as he is alive.

In conclusion, worshipping Him is the highest level of education; it provokes one's thought and calls one's way of thinking towards the endless boundaries.

It wipes out and washes away all the dust of sinfulness and negligence from one's heart and soul, while inculcating supreme human values within him. It strengthens one's faith and awareness, and makes one responsible in his affairs.

It is for this reason that it would be impossible to imagine that man might be needless of this great educational school for even one moment. Those who think man may reach a stage where he will be no more in need of worshipping, either have regarded man's development as a limited process, or they have not grasped the full meaning of worshipping.

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1. Tafsir Majma'-ul Bayan
2. Surah Az-Zumar, No. 39, verse 23
3. Tafsir-i-Kanz-ud-Daqh ayegh
4. Tafsir-us-Safi
5. Tafsir-Kanz-ud-Daqayiq

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