

Resurrection or a Corporeal Return

Considering the numerous proofs and evidences, some of the scholars and experts, have accepted the theory of life after death, but have confined it to the spiritual resurrection. They claim that after death, it is only the soul of man which shall continue its life, but his material body and its elements with which he led his worldly life would not be resurrected. Thus they tend to be the 'deniers of corporeal resurrection'. Whereas, usually, in Islam, whenever resurrection is discussed, both, the corporeal and the spiritual resurrection is purported and both of them have been accepted. Hence, we too, shall have a short discussion on this topic.

Allamah Majlisi (a.r.) in these context states: “The corporeal resurrection is among the things which are unanimously accepted by all the sects and is considered as one of the necessities of the religion. Deniers of it have been regarded as those who deny the necessity of religion and cannot be considered as Muslims, because the Qur’anic verses, in this context, are explicit and are not capable of being allegorically interpreted. In addition to this, there are innumerable traditions, indicating the corporeal resurrection, which cannot be denied.”¹

Of course, it should be known that, proving the actual resurrection is possible by means of rational and scientific proofs, and as we had dwelt upon in the foregoing discussions, it is not only possible but also necessary, however to prove the details of resurrection, and amongst them the corporeal resurrection, by means of rational or scientific proofs is a task extremely difficult or even impossible. And because of this, the great philosopher Avicenna writes: “The peculiarities and the details of the topic of resurrection, like the corporeality of it, do not fit into the scope of rational or intellectual discussion, but for such kinds of subjects, it is necessary to seek help from the Revelation and the narrations of the religious leaders”.² Hence, we, so as to not exceed the limits of this book, shall only refer to the verses of the holy Qur’an for the purpose of proving the corporeal resurrection. All the verses, which refer to the corporeal resurrection, can be categorized into six groups to which we shall refer below.

1. The first group consists of verses in which at the onset, the talks of the deniers of resurrection are mentioned after which the answer is provided. Their doubts were that “how could we, after death and disintegration of the bodies, become alive again”? An interesting point here is that one of the deniers

had pulled up a semi-decayed bone and while showing it to the Holy Prophet (S) proceeded to ask such a question. The Holy Qur'an in answer says:

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ . قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي
أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ

“And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten. Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is Cognizant of all creation.”³

Considering the fact that the question was in reference to decayed bones and bodies and not in reference to the human soul, it can be very clearly comprehended that the answer is also in reference to the same context. Hence, after death, Allah shall make these very bodies alive on the day of the Universal Resurrection. An interesting point in the above verse is that the reason for such an occurrence being possible is also mentioned and that being the Divine Power which had created man and the body at the first instance.

2. The second group consists of verses that refer to the fact that on the day of resurrection, people shall rise from their graves and come out from beneath the earth. Here we shall refer to only two verses from among them.

(وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ

“And that the Hour (of Resurrection) is coming there is no doubt therein and that Allah will raise up those in the graves.”⁴

This verse and those similar to this mention the corporeal resurrection, because that which rests within the graves are bodies of men. Thus on the day of resurrection, this very material and elemental body shall be given life and continue to lead it.

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى

“From it We created you and into it We shall send you back and from it will We raise you a second time.”⁵

That which lies beneath the earth and once again (according to the above verse) shall come out on the day of resurrection and continue its life is the very same elemental, worldly body. Hence this verse also emphasizes on the corporeal resurrection.

3. The third group consists of verses, which liken the coming to life of man after death to the coming to life of the earth after its death, like this verse:

رِزْقًا لِلْعِبَادِ وَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيِّتًا كَذَلِكَ الْخُرُوجُ

“And We give life thereby to a dead land; thus will be Resurrection.”⁶

The expression that has been used in the verse alludes that the Holy Qur’an does not just have the resurrection of the souls under consideration and lays emphasis on it but also lays special stress on corporeal resurrection. This is because, if this very same elemental body, on the Day of Judgment, is not resurrected, there is no appropriateness in resembling it to the coming to life of the earth after its death. In other words, spiritual resurrection is nothing except the existence of the soul after the disintegration of the body, and this existence has no similarity with the coming to life of the earth after its death.

4. The fourth group consists of verses that refer to the act of speaking by the various parts of the body of man like the hands, legs, eyes, ears and skin on the Day of Judgment.

In addition to it, verses which inform about the happiness, joy and cheerfulness of some of the faces and alternatively, about other faces being sorrowful and miserable indicate towards the corporeal resurrection of men after death. Similarly, it is possible to consider, as part of this group, those verses which refer to the giving or taking of the 'book of deeds' of people in the right or the left hand, because if the corporeal resurrection does not occur, how can the hands, legs, eyes, ears... bear witness against man on the day of Judgment:

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

“On that day We will set a seal upon their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness of what they earned.”⁷

Or how could some of the faces exhibit cheer and radiance whereas faces of others exhibit misery and darkness:

يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did.”⁸

In all events, perhaps this collection of verses is the best proof for establishing the corporeal resurrection because basically, in the spiritual resurrection, the existence of arms, legs, eyes, ears and other parts of the body just does not arise and as a result talks about them also cease to exist.

5. This group consists of verses, which describes the material bounties of Paradise, like eating the heavenly fruits, possessing beautiful, heavenly, virgin nymphs and also beautiful and decorated beds for the comfort of the people of Paradise.

This group of the verses have appeared in numerous chapters of the Holy Qur’an, in a detailed manner and we mention only one example from amongst them:

عَلَى سُرُرٍ مَوْضُونَةٍ. مُتَّكِنِينَ عَلَيْهَا مُتَقَابِلِينَ. يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُخَلَّدُونَ.
بِأَكْوَابٍ وَأَبَارِيقَ وَكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَعِينٍ. لَا يُصَدَّعُونَ عَنْهَا وَلَا يُنْزَفُونَ. وَفَاكِهَةٍ مِمَّا
يَتَخَيَّرُونَ. وَلَحْمِ طَيْرٍ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ. وَحُورٍ عِينٍ

“On thrones decorated, Reclining on them face to face. Around shall go about them youths never altering in age. With goblets and ewers and a cup of pure drink. They shall not be affected by any headache thereby, nor shall they get exhausted. And fruits that they prefer. And flesh of fowls such as they desire. And fair ones with large lovely eyes.”⁹

In addition to these, those verses, which mention the physical chastisement of the people of the hell, can also be included in this group because if the corporeal resurrection did not exist and this same body would not be made alive again, then how does it have the pleasures, sorrows and the physical pains and how then could these verses be explained?

6. The sixth group consists of verses which mention examples of the occurrence of corporeal resurrection in this very world, like the verses which relate the bringing to life of a dead person by the Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) (‘a), or those which explain the coming to life of the People of the Cave. In addition to these, the incidents of Prophet Uzair (Ezra) (‘a) or Prophet Irmiyah who have been referred to in the Holy Qur’an without being mentioned by name, and who, after their death, are once again brought back to life:

أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ
مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ

بَلْ لَبِثْتَ مِائَةً عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانظُرْ إِلَى حِمَارِكَ
وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَانظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ
لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“Or the like of him (Uzair) who passed by a town and it had fallen down upon its roofs; he said: When will Allah give it life after its death? So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him to life. He said: How long have you tarried? He said: I have tarried a day or a part of a day. Said He: Nay! you have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink – years have not passed over it; and look at your donkey; and that We may make you a sign to men, and look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh; so when it became clear to him, he said; I know that Allah has power over all things.” 10

7. These are the actual and historical examples of the occurrence of corporeal resurrection in this very world, which have been emphasized in the verses of this group.

From all the verses of these six groups and also some other verses, it can be stated that according to the Holy Qur’an, the corporeal resurrection (in addition to the spiritual resurrection) is a matter, which is conclusive and certain, and with the abundance of these verses, there lies no room for any skepticism or presumptive explanation. Of course, some doubts of rational and philosophical nature have been propounded, the presentation of which requires a more appropriate occasion. 11

1. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 7, Pg. 47,

2. Habibullah Tahiri, Sairi dar Jahan Pas az Marg, quoting from Avicenna's 'Shefa'

3. Ya Sin (36):78-79

4. Hajj (22):7

5. Taha (20):55

6. Qaf (50): 11

7. Ya Sin (36):65

8. Nūr (24):24

9. Waqiyah (56):15-22

10. Baqarah (2):259

11. Among these doubts were two objections.

i) The impossibility of return of that which has been destroyed. Technically this doubt has been termed as (امتناع اعاده معدوم)

ii) The doubt of the eater and the eaten which is well known by the technical expression (آكل و مأكول)

These doubts and those similar to these along with their numerous answers have been presented in their appropriate topics and there lies no need to present it in this short treatise.

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