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The Case of Adam (a.s.)

It will help us greatly if we, first of all, study the verses of the Qur'an about the creation of Adam, his stay in Paradise, and his coming to the earth.

Chapter 2 (al-Baqarah) verses 30–39: The Creation

When your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a vicegerent on the earth," the angels said, "Will You place on the earth the one who shall act wickedly in it and shed blood; whereas we sing Your praise and glorify You?" Allah said, "Surely I know what you do not know."

And [after creating Adam] Allah taught Adam all the names. Then He presented those to the angels and said, "Tell me the names of these if you are true [in what your assumption that you are more superior than Adam]." They said, "Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are surely the All-Knowing, the Wise." [Then] He said, "O Adam! Tell them the names of those [persons]." When Adam told them those names, Allah said [to the angels], "Didn't I say to you that I know the unseen things of the heavens and the earth, and I know what you manifest and what you hide."

And [remember] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam." All of them prostrated except Iblis, who refused and was haughty, and [thus] he became one of the unbelievers.

In Paradise:

*[After creating Hawwa}, We said, "O Adam, Dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from it [freely] as many [things] as you wish; but do not approach this tree, otherwise you will become one of the "alimeen **النَّالِمِينَ**."*

But the Shaytan made them slip (أَزَلَّهُمَا) from that [Garden by luring them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree] and thus got them out from the state [of felicity] in which they had been.

So We said [to Adam, Hawwa, and the Shaytan that, "All of you] get down [from the Garden to the

earth] some of you being the enemies of the other, and there is on the earth your abode and the necessities [of life] for a [fixed period of] time.” [Adam felt ashamed and intended to ask Allah's forgiveness.] So Adam learnt some words from his Lord, and Allah turned to him mercifully (تَابَ عَلَيْهِ). Surely He is the Most-Forgiving, the Merciful. We said, “All of you get down from the Garden. [Once you are on the earth], a guidance will certainly come to you from Me: whosoever follows My guidance, there will be no fear for them nor shall they grieve. But those who disbelieve and reject Our revelation, they are the inmates of the Fire, in it they shall abide.”

Chapter 7 (al-A'râf) verses 19-25

[Allah said,] “O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from wherever you wish; but do not approach this tree, otherwise you will become one of the **“alimeen** الظَّالِمِينَ”

Then the Shaytan instilled temptation into them so as to reveal to them their private parts that were hidden from them. He said, “Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you both become rulers, or lest you become immortals.” [To ensure that his temptation will work, the Shaytan] swore to them both that, “Truly, I am a sincere adviser for you.” Thus he misled them by delusion.

So when they tasted [the fruit of] the tree, their private parts became manifest to them, and both of them started to cover themselves with the leaves of the Garden. Their Lord called out to them, “Did I not prohibit both of you from this tree and say to you that the Shaytan is your open enemy?”

They said, “Our Lord! We have been unjust to ourselves (**“alamna** ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا); and if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers.”

Allah said, “Get down [to the earth], some of you being the enemies of the others; and there is on the earth your abode and necessities [of life] for a time.” He said, “Therein you shall live, therein you shall die, and from it you shall be raised [again].”

Chapter 20 (Ta Ha) verses 116-126

And [remember] when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” all of them prostrated except Iblis who refused and was haughty.

Therefore, We said, “O Adam! this [Shaytan] is an enemy to you and your wife. So do not let him expel you from the Garden, otherwise you will be uncomfortable (تَشْقَى): in it [i.e., the Garden] you shall neither be hungry nor naked, and you shall neither be thirsty therein nor struck by the sun's rays.”

But the Shaytan instilled temptation to him by saying, “O Adam! Shall I guide you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which will not decline?” When [they] both ate of that tree, their private parts became manifest to them and both of them started to cover themselves with the leaves of

the Garden.

Adam disobeyed (عَصَى) his Lord, and so he erred (غَوَى). Then his Lord chose him, and then He turned to him and guided him.

[Then] Allah said [to Shaytan and Adam], “You both get down from this [Garden}, some of you being the enemies of the other. [On the earth], a guidance will certainly come to you from Me, and then whosoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor will he be unhappy. But whosoever turns away from My reminder, then he shall surely have a wretched life and we shall resurrect him blind.”

Review of Adam’s Story

1. According to the experts of Islamic jurisprudence, the orders given by Allah are of two types:

Al-amr al-mawlawi, a legislative command. Such orders must be implemented; and, if someone disobeys such a command, then he is committing a sin and is liable to be punished. For example, the command to “say the daily prayers” or “do not eat the pork” is of such nature. Neglecting the daily prayers or eating of the pork is a sin and Allah can rightly punish the sinner.

Al-amr al-irshadi, an advisory command. Such orders are of advisory nature; their purpose is to inform the people about its consequences. However, if someone disobeys such an order, then he is not committing a sin; of course, he will have to face the consequences of not following the advice. For example, the command to “say ***bismillah*** when you slaughter the chicken” is of advisory nature.

Now, if someone slaughters the chicken and neglects the saying of “***bismillah***,” then has he committed a sin? No, he has not committed a sin nor is he liable for a punishment for not saying the “***bismillah***” at that time. However, he will lose the right to eat that chicken; that chicken cannot be eaten by a Muslim.

Another example: a person comes to his doctor complaining of cough. The doctor advises his patient to drink a certain medicine, a cough syrup. Now if the patient ignores that advice, then he is not committing a sin or a crime; but he will surely suffer the consequence — his illness will be prolonged and his health might deteriorate.

Conclusion: not all commands of Allah are of obligatory or prohibitive nature. The advice given to Adam and Hawwa was not of the legislative nature. It was not that that particular tree and its fruit themselves were forbidden. The prohibition of going near that tree and eating its fruit was ***al-amr al-irshadi***. And going against such an order is not a sin; at most, the doer will have to face the consequences of ignoring that advice. In case of Adam and his wife, the consequence they faced was cancellation of their tenure as guests of Allah in the Paradise and its comforts. Remember that they were not supposed to stay in the Paradise forever; they were created for the earth, and their stay in the Paradise was meant to be temporary.

2. The Garden/Paradise is not the place for test and trial. It is this earth on which human beings have been destined to go through test and trial by obeying the commands of Allah. The concept of sinning in case of human beings is connected to the worldly life.

In the story of Adam itself, Allah makes this point clear when He orders Adam to go to the earth—He said,

“You both get down from this [Garden], some of you being the enemies of the other. [On the earth], a guidance will certainly come to you from Me, and then whosoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor will he be unhappy. But whosoever turns away from My reminder, then he shall surely have a wretched life and we shall resurrect him blind.” (20: 126)

The order given to Adam in Heaven is not same as the orders given to human beings in this world—it is disobedience of the orders given on this earth that constitutes sin.

Finally, the Shaytan himself knows that he does not have the power to mislead the prophets, the messengers, and those who are graced with purity by Almighty Himself. When he was given respite by Allah, he declared the following:

“So I swear by Your Might (O Lord) that I will surely mislead them all together except the devoted servants of Yours from among them.” (38:82-3; 15:39-40)

And Allah responds to him by saying,

“...As for my servants, you have no power over them except those who follow you from among the misled people...” (15:41)

The Satan himself knew the limitation of his influence upon the chosen servants of Allah in this world.

3. Those who believe that Adam committed a sin, describe the eating of the forbidden fruit as the “sin” and Adam's expulsion from the heaven as the “punishment”. However, this relationship between the sin and its punishment is not valid because of two reasons:

Firstly, Adam was destined to come to the earth anyway. Allah had declared even before creating Adam that ***“I want to place a vicegerent on the earth.”*** So coming of Adam to the earth is not a punishment; whether or not he ate the forbidden fruit, Adam would have come to the earth anyway. So that was not a punishment.

Secondly, if coming of Adam to the earth was a “punishment” of eating the forbidden fruit, then he should have been returned to the paradise after Allah “forgave” him. Forgiveness means “canceling the punishment”—Adam should have been taken back to the paradise. This did not happen, which proves that Adam's coming to the earth was not a “punishment”; and eating was not a “sin”.

4. What about the words in the story Adam that imply that he committed sin?

After studying the issue of *'ismah* from the Qur'anic point of view, if we come across such words we have to interpret them in a way that they are in harmony with the other verses of the Qur'an. Now let us look at three such words that have occurred in the story of Adam.

First: the word "alimeen الظالمين" is from *ʿulm* ظلم. This word has four meanings: (a) to put something in a wrong place; (b) to oppress; (c) to make haste; and (d) to come to harm.¹

We see that the last two meanings of the word are in harmony with what we explained about *'ismah*. For example, verse 2:35 would read like this:

We said, "O Adam, Dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from it [freely] as many [things] as you wish; but do not approach this tree, otherwise you will be one of those who put themselves into harm."

Here, "harm" would mean facing the difficulties of the earthly life and losing the comforts of the heaven.
or

"...otherwise, you will be **one of those who make haste.**" Here, "making haste" would mean that they were eventually to go to the earth but by eating from the forbidden tree they hastened their departure to a place where they will lose the comforts of the Garden.

This meaning of the word *alimeen* الظالمين is supported by the next verse that says that the Shaytan "got them out from **the state [of comfort]** in which they had been." Also the verse 20:117 supports this interpretation: ***"O Adam! this [Shaytan] is an enemy to you and your wife. So do not let him expel you from the Garden, otherwise you will be uncomfortable: in it [i.e., the Garden] you shall neither be hungry nor naked, and you shall neither be thirsty therein nor struck by the sun's rays."*** In other words, here food, clothing and shelter are readily provided for you; you will lose these comforts on the earth. Here everything is provided but there you will have to work for yourselves.

Second: the word عَصَى means "disobeyed". This does not necessarily imply sin because disobedience can be attributed to two types of commands: *al-amr al-mawlawi* (a legislative command) or *al-amr al-irshadi* (an advisory command). If a person goes against the advisory command, then he has "disobeyed" but not "sinned". We have already explained that commands of Allah do not always have the force of obligation or prohibition. And, by keeping in mind those verses which prove the *'ismah*, we have no choice but to interpret this word as "disobeyed the advisory command".

Third: Similarly, the word غَوَى means "he erred". But this does not necessarily mean sin. It can easily be applied to *at-tarku 'l-awla* which is possible for a prophet to do. *At-tarku 'l-awla* (ترك الأولى) means "leaving the more appropriate behaviour". "Adam erred" would mean that even if the command of Allah did not carry the force of legislative prohibition, still Adam should have obeyed it. In disregarding the advisory command of Allah, Adam is guilty not of a sin but of not living up to the appropriate behaviour which is expected from a prophet or messenger of God.

5. If Adam did not commit a sin, then why does Allah talk about repentance for Adam and forgiveness

from Himself, and uses so strong words as

الظالمين and عصى etc?

Firstly, When a prophet like Adam commits ***at-tarku 'l-awla***, it is quite appropriate for him to ask Allah for pardon—not necessarily for a sin but for an inappropriate behaviour. So “repenting” does not necessarily mean that Adam must have committed a sin; it is quite appropriate rather advisable even after committing ***at-tarku 'l-awla***.

Secondly, the use of harsh words by Allah in describing the story of Adam is acceptable by keeping in mind the status of Adam. Although Adam did not commit a sin, it was improper for him to adopt an inappropriate behaviour. The people with high ranks are expected to live by the standard that is higher than that of the normal human beings. As the saying goes: the virtuous deeds of the pious are considered 'sins' by those who are nearest to God — ***hasanâtu 'l-abrâr sayyi'âtu 'l-muqarrabin***.

1. See al-Munjid, the famous Arabic dictionary that gives following meanings to ad-dulm:

الجور، وضع الشيء في غير موضعه، كل ما أعجلته عن أوانه

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