

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 21-25

(٢١) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

(٢٢) الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فَرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ
بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

(٢٣) وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا
شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

(٢٤) فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ
لِلْكَافِرِينَ

(٢٥) وَيَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ
مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

evil) (21) ;

Who made the earth a bed (resting place) and the sky a structure; and (Who) sends down rain from the heaven, thereby brings forth with it subsistence for you of the fruits; therefore do not set up equals to Allah while you know (22).

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful (23).

But if you do (it) not – and never shall you do (it) – then be on guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers (24) .

And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds that for them are gardens in which rivers flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: “This is what was given to us before;– and they shall be given the like of it, and they shall have pure mates in them; and in them they shall abide (25).

Commentary

Qur’an: *O men! worship your Lord . . . may guard (against evil)*: The preceding nineteen verses have described the positions of the three groups category-wise: The pious ones who are on the guidance from their Lord; the disbelievers whose hearts and ears have been sealed and who have their eyes covered; and the hypocrites in whose hearts there is disease so Allah added to their disease and they are deaf, dumb and blind.

In this background, Allah calls the men to be His good servants, to worship Him and to join, not the disbelievers and the hypocrites, but the pious ones, those who guard themselves against evil. This context shows that the clause, “so that you may guard (against evil)”, is governed by the verb “worship” – you should worship Allah to join those who guard against evil, who are pious. It may also be governed by the verb, “created” – Allah created you in order that you may guard yourselves against evil.

Qur’an: *Who made the earth a bed . . . do not set up equals to Allah while you know: “al-Andad”* (الأنداد) is plural of *an-nidd* (النِّدَّ = alike, equal, peer). The phrase, “while you know”, is unconditional, and grammatically it is circumstantial phrase of “do not set up”; these two factors lend extra-ordinary force to the prohibition of setting up equals to Allah.

The sentence shows that a man who has even a little knowledge should not ascribe any equal or partner to Allah; he should know that it is Allah Who has created him and those before him and arranged and managed this system in the creation for their sustenance and survival.

Qur’an: *And if you are in doubt . . . then produce a chapter like it . . .* : It is a challenge which human beings and jinn can never meet. This challenge has been offered to demonstrate the miracle of

the Qur'an, to show that it is a Book sent down by Allah, there is no doubt in it; that it has been revealed as an everlasting miracle that will remain alive till the end of the world. This challenge has repeatedly been given in the Qur'an:

Say: "If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, even though some of them were aiders of the others" (17:88).

Or, do they say: "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring ten chapters like it forged and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful" (11:13).

This context shows that the pronoun "it" in "like it" refers to "that which We have revealed to Our servant", that is, the Qur'an. It is a challenge to them to bring a like of the Qur'an in its inimitable style and meaning.

The word "*min mithlihi*" (من مثله = translated here as "like it") may also be rendered as "from like him". In that case it will be a challenge to bring a like of the Qur'an written by someone like the Holy Prophet.

This Qur'an has been brought by a person who was never taught by any teacher, who had not learnt these valuable and marvelous truths from any human being, nor had he taken this most eloquent style from any mortal.

If the disbelievers thought that such a man can write such a Book, then let them bring its like from some such illiterate man. In this light, the verse would have the same import as the following one:

Say: "If Allah had desired (otherwise) I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have taught it to you; indeed I have lived a lifetime among you before it; do you not then understand?" (10:16)

Both explanations have been given in some Tradition.

Obviously, this and the other challenging verses dare the antagonists to bring, if they can, like of even the shortest chapter of the Qur'an – say, the Chapter of *al-Kawthar* or *al-Asr*.

A strange exegesis has been written by someone that "like it" means like this Chapter, The Cow, in which this verse occurs. This explanation is totally devoid of good literary taste. Those who disbelieved in the Qur'an, rejected the whole Book as being forged against Allah.

What purpose could be served by challenging them to bring a Chapter like that of The Cow? Such a challenge would, in final analysis, mean this: If you are in doubt the short Chapter of *al-Kawthar* or *al-Ikhlads*, then bring a like of the largest Chapter of The Cow. Absurd, isn't it!

Miracle And Its Quiddity

The claim of the Qur'an that it is a miraculous sign, and the challenge to the doubters offered by this

verse, contains in reality two claims: First, that miracles, super-natural events, do occur; second, that the Qur'an is one of such miracles.

If the second claim is proved, the first will automatically be proved. That is why the Qur'an has challenged the men to bring its like, as it would prove both aspects of the claim.

How does a miracle happen? After all, it is against the deep-rooted system of the cause-and-effect which is never negated. The Qur'an explains this subject in the following two stages:

First: The miracle is a reality; the Qur'an is one of the miracles, which in itself proves the existence of miracles in general; it offers a challenge to its adversaries and in this way proves its truth.

Second: What is the reality of miracle? How can a thing happen in this world of nature against the universal law of the cause-and-effect?

The Miracle Of The Qur'an

Undoubtedly, the Qur'an has offered a continuing challenge, by which it proves itself to be a miracle. This challenge has been given in many verses of Meccan as well as Medinite period. All of them show that this Book is a divine miracle, a super-natural sign.

The verse under discussion, "And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it . . . ", is one of those challenges: Produce a chapter like one of the Qur'an from someone like the Prophet.

It should be noted that it does not purport to prove the prophethood of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) directly; it does not say, 'if you are in doubt as to the prophethood of Our, servant'; instead it says, 'if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant'.

Likewise, all the challenges given in the Qur'an aim to prove that this Book is a super-natural sign from Allah. And when this fact is established, the prophethood of the Prophet will automatically be proved.

The verses of challenge vary in their scope and generality. The most general is the verse:

Say: `If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, even though some of them were aiders of the others" (17:88).

The verse is of Meccan period, and it is easy to see that it contains an all-encompassing challenge.

This challenge is not confined to its unsurpassed eloquence and purest style. Otherwise, the challenge would not cover non-Arabs; it could be addressed to only those who spoke pure Arabic before it was debased by foreign influence – in other words, only to the Arabs of the days of paganism or to those whose life-span bridged the time of paganism and that of Islam. But the verse challenges not only the

whole mankind but confronts the *jinn* also.

As for other special qualities of the Qur'an (like the exposition of spiritual realities, the high morals, the most comprehensive and the fairest legal code, the information of the things unseen as well as other subjects which the man had not even thought of when the Qur'an was revealed), they are of such a nature that only a selected group – and not the whole mankind – may appreciate them.

But the challenge is general and covers elites and common men and *jinn*. It is clear in this light that it is not confined to any one quality; it defies them to bring a like of this Book in all its qualities together.

The Qur'an is a miracle: For a man of eloquence, in its spellbinding sublimity and style; for a sage, in its sagacity; for a scholar, in its knowledge; for a sociologist, in its social system; for a legislator, in its legislation; for a politician, in its politics; for a ruler, in its rule of justice; and for the whole world, in such things which none of them can grasp like the information of the unseen, prophecies of future events, freedom from discrepancy in its laws, knowledge and expression.

The Qur'an claims to be a comprehensive miracle, covering all its aspects. It is a miracle for every individual man and *jinn* –an average person or a select one, learned or ignorant, man or woman, of a very high rank of excellence or of a lower level –in short, anyone who has enough intelligence to understand the Qur'anic speech.

Man, by nature, comprehends a virtue and understands its various grades. Every person should look into an excellence which he or someone else has got; then he should compare that excellence or virtue with what the Qur'an contains of the same; and then he should decide – in all honesty and justice – whether it is in human power to bring a like of the Qur'an. Is it possible for a man to bring such divine knowledge, so well-reasoned, as the Qur'an has done?

Is it within human power to build such character, based on foundation of reality, which may honestly be compared with the Qur'anic teaching in purity and excellence? Can human beings legislate perfect laws covering all human activities without blundering into discrepancies, with the spirit of monotheism and the word of piety permeating every order and its every implication, with purity and cleanliness feeding its root and shoots?

Can such astonishing comprehensiveness and all-inclusiveness come from an untaught man? A man who was born and brought up among a people whose only share in human virtues was a life sustained with raids, plunders and wars; they buried their daughters alive, and killed their children for fear of poverty; they boasted of their fathers and married their mothers; debauchery was their pride; they condemned knowledge and showed off their ignorance; in spite of their haughtiness and chauvinism, they were preyed upon by every hunter and were easy targets for anyone who wished to conquer them – one day they were under the Yemenite rule, the next day were ruled over by the Ethiopians; some day Byzantine emperors lorded over them, the other day it was Persia's turn to humiliate them. This is the picture, in miniature, of the Arabs before Islam. And in such environment, the Qur'an was brought by the

Prophet of Islam.

Again, suppose a man brings a book, claiming that it is a guidance for the worlds. Will he dare to include in it the news and informations of the unseen – both past and future – not in one or two places but spread over a lot of topics – in stories, in prophecies, and about the events that are to happen in future? And what will be your judgment if not a single detail proves wrong?

Once again, man is a part of this natural world; this world is constantly changing and developing from perfection to perfection. Is it possible for a man to talk about each –and every affair of human life; to give the world knowledge, laws, wisdom, admonition, parables, stories – concerning every matter, big or small – without committing any discrepancy, without showing any trace of gradual development?

And especially so, if his talks are not delivered all at one time, are delivered piecemeal in a long period of twenty–three years? And even more so when some topics are repeated again and again, when there are shoots sprouting from a previously planted root? Undoubtedly, it is not possible, because no man can remain unchanged in his knowledge and outlook throughout his life.

When a man ponders over these facts about the Qur'an –containing the above–mentioned distinctions besides many more – he can entertain no doubt whatsoever about its divine origin; he will feel sure that it is beyond human power, over and above the natural and material causes.

If someone is not in a position to understand this clear fact, he should follow the dictate of his nature – in other words, he should ask those who are knowledgeable about this subject.

Question: Why did not the Qur'an confine its challenge to the elite only? What is the use of including general public in this call? After all, a common man is easily– influenced by such claims and it takes him no time to accept pretensions of every pretender.

Don't you see that it was this group that surrendered to al–Bab, al–Baha', Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyan and al– Musaylamah, even though what those deceivers brought as their proof was more like a senseless jabber and raving delirium than a sensible talk?

Reply: It was the only way to keep the miracle all–inclusive; the only possible method for discerning the perfection and excellence in a quality that has various ranks and grades. People have different grades of understanding; likewise, the virtues differ in their perfection.

Those who have high level of understanding and correct perception will easily appreciate the high quality of an excellent work. Those who have a lower understanding should refer to the former for their judgement. It is the dictate of nature and demand of human psyche.

A miracle that can be universal and comprehensive, that can be addressed to every individual, in every place and at all times, that can be conveyed to all and can remain alive to the last day of the world, must necessarily be a set of divine knowledge and spiritual realities.

All other miracles were either material objects or a tangible event that were governed by the laws of nature inasmuch as they were confined to a certain time and space.

They were seen by only a limited number of people; even supposing, for the sake of argument, that it was observed by all people of that particular place, it could not be witnessed by people of other localities; and suppose that an impossible happened, that is, it was seen by the whole world, it could not continue eternally for the future generations to observe.

It was for this reason that Allah chose this academic and spiritual miracle, that is, the Qur'an, for the Prophet of Islam, so that it may continue its challenge to the whole mankind –in all places and in all generations. And thus the miracle continues in its generality, defying every person, in every area and every era.

First Specific Challenge: The Knowledge It Contains

Now we come to its specific challenges. It has offered particular challenge concerning the knowledge it imparts and cognition it contains. Allah says:

. . . and We have revealed the Book to you explaining clearly everything (16:89);

. . . nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear book (6:59).

There are many other verses of the same theme. Look at the fundamental teachings given in the text of the Qur'an; then see its details for which it has referred the people to the Prophet – as Allah says:

. . . and whatever the Apostle gives you, take it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back . . . (59:7);

. . . that you may judge between people by means of that which Allah has taught you (4:105).

Then you will know that Islam has put its attention to all big and small topics relevant to divine knowledge, moral virtues and religious laws – covering worship, mutual dealings, social regulations, penal code, and, in short, everything that affects life and character.

All this is based on the foundation of human nature and monotheism. Analyze the details and you will find monotheism as their basis; combine the basis with relevant principles and you will get the details.

Then it has declared that all this knowledge will remain valid to the end of the world; will continue to guide mankind and will always be relevant to human needs and environment. Allah says:

. . . and most surely it is a Mighty Book: Falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it; a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One (41:41–42).

Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian (15:9).

In other words, it is a Book which is beyond the reach of the law of change and development; it will never be disturbed by abrogation.

A question may be asked here: The sociologists are of the opinion that the laws and regulations controlling the society must change according to the changes occurring in the structure of society. As the time passes and civilization marches ahead, it becomes necessary to change the laws to cope with the changed situation.

Then how can the *sharī`ah* of Islam continue without any change or abrogation all these centuries? We shall explain this matter, God willing, under the verse:

Mankind was but one people . . . (2:213).

Here it is enough to point out that the Qur'an has built its laws on the foundation of monotheism and excellent ethics that spring from healthy human nature; it declares that legislation must grow up from the seed of creation and existence.

The scholars of sociology, on the other hand, have fixed their eyes on changes of society, totally ignoring the spiritual side of monotheism and morality. As a result, their word concentrates on material development of the society – and society is not a living organism, it does not have a soul; and the word of Allah is the highest.

Second Specific Challenge: The Recipient Of The Revelation

Another aspect of this challenge is the personality of the untaught Prophet who brought this Qur'an as a miracle in its words and in its meanings. He had not learnt from any teacher, was not trained by any instructor.

This challenge is contained in the following words of Allah:

Say: "If Allah had desired (otherwise) I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have taught it to you; indeed I have lived a lifetime among you before it; do you not then understand?" (10:16).

The Prophet lived among them as one of them. In all those years, he had not risen above them in scholarship, nor was he renowned for any knowledge. He did not deliver any lecture, nor did he compose a single line of poetry, up to his fortieth year – that is to say, for about two-thirds of his total life-span; he did not get any distinction in literature or scholarship all these years.

Then, all of a sudden, he brought what he said was the revelation from God, before which giants of literature felt like pigmies, and eloquent speakers became tongue-tied. He published that revelation to

the furthest limits of the world, but no one dared to bring its like in all these centuries.

The outmost that his adversaries could say was that he must have learnt those stories from Christian monks during his trade-journeys to Syria. But he had gone to Syria only twice: First, in his early childhood, with his uncle, Abū Talib and then, at the age of twenty-five, with Maysarah, the slave of Khadījah. In both these journeys he was never alone day or night, and nobody ever reported any such meeting with any supposed teacher.

Even if we accept for the sake of argument that such training session did take place, many questions will arise from it: Who taught him this divine knowledge of monotheism? Where did he get these wise rules and these realities? And lastly, who gave him this unsurpassed elocution which has kept the silver-tongued elocutionists dumbfounded all these years?

Another suggestion was that he learned these sublime truths from a blacksmith, of Roman origin, who made and sold swords. Allah replied to this allegation in this verse:

And certainly We know that they say: "Only a mortal teaches him ". The tongue of him whom they are inclined to blame for it is barbarous, and this is clear Arabic language (16: 103).

A third accusation was that he gained this knowledge from Salman, the Persian, who allegedly knew all about various religions and sects. But Salman met the Prophet in Medina and thereafter accepted Islam, while the major portion of the Qur'an was revealed at Mecca, and that part contained all the principles, knowledge and stories that were later repeated at Medina – we may say that Meccan revelation had more of these things, than the verses revealed at Medina. The question is: What knowledge did Salman add after his conversion to Islam? Nothing.

Moreover, read the Old and the New Testaments, and compare the stories of the previous prophets and their people written in them with those revealed in the Qur'an. You will see that the latter's history and stories are different from the former's. The Bible attributes such sins and evils to the prophets of Allah which one would be loth to ascribe to an average man of good character.

But the Qur'an absolves them from such blames. Then you will find in the Bible many topics that have no bearing on, and relevance to, the spiritual knowledge or moral excellence. The Qur'an never talks except about that which is truly beneficial to people in their spiritual upliftment and character-building.

Third Specific Challenge: Its Prophecies And Information Of Unseen

The Qur'an's third specific challenge is concerning its prophecies and the information it gives of the unseen. Such verses may be divided in four categories:

1. The information about previous prophets and their nations: Allah says about some of these stories:

These are of the tidings of the unseen which We revealed to you; you did not know them – (neither) you nor your people – before this. . . (11:49);

and He says after the story of Yūsuf:

This is of the tidings of the unseen (which) We revealed to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans (12 :102);

also, about the story of Maryam:

This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another (3:44);

and about `Isa:

Such is `Isa, son of Maryam; (this is) the saying of truth about which they dispute (19:34).

There are many verses of the same import.

2. Prophecies of future events: For example: The Romans would avenge their defeat:

The Romans are vanquished, in a near land; and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome within a few years (30:2-4);

the Prophet would return to Mecca after his *hijrah*:

Most surely He Who has made the Qur'an binding on you will bring you back to the destination (28 :85);

the vision of the Prophet would certainly come true:

Certainly Allah had shown to His Apostle the vision with truth: You shall most certainly enter the Sacred Mosque, if Allah pleases, in security, (some) having their heads shaved and (others) having their haircut, you shall not fear (48:27);

the behaviour, in future, of a group of Muslims:

Those who are left behind will say when you set forth for the gaining of acquisition: Allow us (that) we may follow you. They desire to change the words of Allah (48:15);

nobody would be able to harm the Prophet:

. . . and Allah will protect you from the men (5:70);

the Qur'an will remain under the protection of Allah:

Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian (15:9).

We may include in this category other numerous verses giving good tidings to the believers and threatening the disbelievers and pagans of Mecca of various retributions.

In this category come the prophecies of the signs and disturbances appearing soon before the Day of Judgement. For example:

And it is forbidden to a town which We destroyed that they shall not return, until when Gog and Magog are let loose and they shall hasten forth from every elevated place. And the true promise shall draw nigh, then lo! the eyes of those who disbelieved shall be fixedly open: O woe to us! surely we were in heedlessness as to this; nay, we were unjust ones (21:95-97).

Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them successors in the earth as He made successors those before them . . . (24:55).

Say: `He has the power that He should send on you a chastisement from above you or from beneath your feet, or that He should throw you into confusion, (making you) of different parties; and make some of you taste the fighting of to others . . . (6:65).

3. The verses based on such scientific realities which were unknown, and even unthought of, when the Qur'an was revealed, and which have just now been discovered after long researches:

And We send the winds fertilizing (15:22);

And the earth - We have spread it forth and put in it anchors (i.e. mountains) and caused to grow in it of everything, weighed(15:19);

Have We not made the earth a resting place, and the mountains as pegs (therein)? (78:6 - 7).

4. The verses that allude to many great events and disorders that were to happen in the Islamic community, or the world in general, after the lifetime of the Prophet. For example:

O you who believe! whoever of you turns back from his religion, then soon Allah will bring a people that He shall love them and they shall love Him, humbled before the believers, mighty against the unbelievers, they shall strive hard in Allah's way and shall not fear the censure of any censurer; this is Allah's grace, He gives it to whom He pleases (5:54);

And every nation had an apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. And they say: "When will this threat come about, if you are truthful?" Say; "I do not control for myself any harm, or any benefit, except what Allah pleases; every nation has a term; when their term comes, they shall not then remain

behind for an hour, nor can they go before (their time)”. Say: “Tell me if His punishment overtakes you by night or by day! What then is there of it that the guilty would hasten on?” (10:47–50) ;

Then set your face uprightly for the (right)religion in natural devotion (to the truth), the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; . . . and be not of the polytheists, of those who divided their religion and became sects; every sect rejoicing in what they had with them (30:30–32).

There are many verses that come into this category, and we shall describe some of them when explaining the seventeenth chapter (The Night–journey). It should be noted here that this category is one of the specialties of this book of ours.

Fourth Specific Challenge: No Discrepancies In The Qur’an

It is one of the challenges of the Qur’an that there is no discrepancy in it. Allah says:

Do they not then meditate on the Qur’an? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82).

This is a material world, governed by the law of change and development. Every item in this world changes day after day from weakness to strength, from deficiency to perfection –in its own self as well as in all its concomitants and attachments. Man is no exception to this rule.

He also undergoes constant change and development in his existence as well as in effects of his actions and reactions. And this law applies also to what he gets through his perception and intellect. Every man finds that his today is a bit more perfect than his yesterday.

Every passing hour makes him realize what mistakes he had committed in the past hour, what erroneous views he had held a few hours back. It is a fact that no sane person can deny.

In this background, look at the Qur’an. Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) brought this book piece by piece, one small chapter or a few verses at a time. It continued for twenty–three years in different places, various conditions and divergent situations:

In Mecca and Medina, by day and by night, during journeys and at home, in thick of battle and in time of peace, during hard up days and in easy times, when Muslims suffered defeat and when they were victorious, in safety and in danger.

It contained all types of subjects – it unveiled spiritual knowledge, taught excellent ethics and ordained laws for every conceivable aspect of life. In spite of all these factors, there is not a whiff of discrepancy in its matter or meaning – it is an oft–repeated book whose parts resemble one with the other.

There is not a least difference, contradiction or contrariety in the realities it has explained, in the principles it has laid down. One verse explains the rest, one sentence clarifies the others, as 'Alī (a.s.) said: "Its one part speaks with the other, and one portion testifies about the others."

No doubt, if such a book would have been from other than Allah, there would have been a lot of ups and downs in its style; the speech would have bounced between elegance and clumsiness; the themes would have ranged from correct to erroneous. In short, the book would have been uneven, unbalanced and full of discrepancies.

Question: This is a claim without any proof. Non-Muslim scholars have written many books showing that the Qur'an suffers from many discrepancies and mistakes – in construction of sentences (which fall short of the standard of eloquence) as well as in themes and meanings (which contain errors in its views and teachings).

The replies given by the Muslims are just piteous attempts to explain away those contradictions and shortcomings. Those are defects that a correct and good speech should not have had in the first place.

Reply: The so-called discrepancies and defects have not been discovered by our adversaries; they have been mentioned (together with their replies) by Muslims in their books of exegesis and other subjects related to the Qur'an (not excepting this book of ours); the Muslim authors have used this method to show that what looks at the first glance an unusual style or expression is in fact a gem of highest eloquence.

The non-Muslim writers have just picked out those supposed defects and discrepancies and collected them in their books, ignoring the replies that showed the real beauty of those expressions. If eye of love is blind, the eye of enmity is not any brighter.

Question: Well, how can you explain away the difficulty that arises out of abrogation? Many Qur'anic verses have been abrogated, as the Qur'an itself says:

Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it (2:106)

;

And when We change (one)communication for (another) communication, and Allah knows best what He reveals . . . (16:101).

Abrogation is at least a change of opinion, an inconsistency of thought, if not an outright contradiction in speech.

Reply: Abrogation is neither a contradiction in speech nor a change of opinion or thought. A rule is abrogated when the society, the environment, changes in such a way that the underlying wisdom of that rule remains no longer valid. The difference, if any, is not in the opinion; it is rather in the subject matter.

A clear evidence of it may be seen in the abrogated verses themselves – they invariably always contained some phrases or clauses to show that the given order was a temporary one, that it would soon be abrogated. For example:

And as for those who are guilty of lewdness from among your women, call to witness against them four(witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness confine them to the houses until death takes them away or Allah makes some way for them(4: 15).

Note the last sentence and the hint it gives. Another example:

Many of the people of the Book wish that they could turn you back into unbelievers after your faith . . . But pardon and forgive (them) until Allah should bring about His command (2: 109).

Here too the concluding phrase shows that the rule ordained was not forever.

Fifth Specific Challenge: Its Eloquence

The Qur'an has also challenged its adversaries to bring its like in its eloquence. Allah says:

Or, do they say: "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring ten chapters like it forged and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." But if they do not answer you, then know that it is revealed by Allah's knowledge and that there is no god but He; will you then submit? (11: 13-14)

These verses were revealed at Mecca. Again Allah says:

Or, do they say: "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring a chapter like this and call whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." Nay, they have rejected that of which they have no comprehensive knowledge, and its final interpretation has not yet come to them (10:38-39).

These are Meccan verses too. All these verses challenge the doubters and disbelievers to bring the like of ten or even one chapter of the Qur'an in its style and eloquence, as eloquence was the most accomplished art of the Arabs of those days. Undoubtedly, they had reached the highest peak of eloquence. No preceding, contemporary or following nation ever reached even near them in their mastery of literature.

Their expression was elegant, their style enchanting; their words perfectly fitted their themes and meanings; their talks were always in harmony with the occasions; their words were plain and their sentences beautiful; and their speech had an easy flow and inimitable grace. It was a way of which they were the pioneers and the only walkers.

The Qur'an challenged such a nation in every possible way, so as to excite their rage, rouse their fury and fire them with determination to meet the challenge. It should not be forgotten that they were

extremely proud of their art of eloquence and never acknowledged the least elocutionary skill to anyone else. In spite of that arrogance of theirs, the Prophet dared them to bring just one chapter like the Qur'an.

It is a challenge that even now is ringing in the ears of disbelievers, defying them to forge, if they can, just one chapter like it. But the Arabs' only answer was to avoid it; the more forcefully they were challenged, the more evident their helplessness was. Ultimately, they used to hide themselves to avoid hearing its sound.

Allah says:

Now surely they fold up their breasts that they may conceal from Him; now surely, when they put their garments as a covering, He knows what they conceal and what they make known (11:5).

Even after fourteen centuries, no one has been able to bring its like. Those who tried it put themselves to shame and made themselves targets of ridicule. History has preserved some samples of those pathetic attempts. Musaylamah (who posed as a prophet) wrote these words in reply to the Qur'an ch. 105 (The Elephant):

“The elephant, what is the elephant! And what will make you understand what the elephant is? It has an unwholesome tail, and a long trunk.”

In another “verse”, which he recited before al-Sajah (who also claimed to be a prophetess), he said: “. . . ***then we penetrate it into you women a hard penetration, and take it out from you forcefully.*** . . .”

Look at this rigmarole and decide its worth. A Christian in latter days wrote this “chapter” in reply to the Chapter of The Opening:

“All praise is due to the Beneficent, the Lord of the beings, the King, the Subduer. For Thee is the worship, and from Thee is the help. Guide us to the path of faith.”

All attempts to meet this challenge suffered the same fate.

Two Questions

First: It is unreasonable to say that a speech can reach a level where it would become a miracle, a super-natural work. Language has been made by human ingenuity. How can a product of nature be above the reach of nature? A maker is more powerful than the thing he makes; a cause always encompasses its effect.

It is the man who invented the words to meet his social needs, to convey to others' minds what one thinks or feels. The relationship of a word with its meaning is created by man. It is a subjective quality given to the word by man. This quality cannot reach beyond the ability of the maker himself. In other

words, it is impossible for a speech to rise above the human ability.

Second: Let us accept for the time being that a particular composition of a speech may reach super-natural level, may become a miracle. Every intended theme may be clothed in various sentences, each differing from the others in grades of perfection; and out of those numerous sentences one would reach a standard which would be beyond human ability and power – and that composition would be a miracle.

It means that for every intended meaning there would be one miraculous sentence; and other structures would be below that standard. But we see that the Qur'an, more often than not, repeats many themes – and especially the stories – using different compositions and dissimilar styles. Whichever sentence-structure and style is accepted as a miracle, the other ones would fall short of that standard.

Reply: Before replying to these objections one matter should be clarified here. It were such questions which led some Muslim scholars to believe in the theory of *as-sarf* (الصَّرْف = to turn away). They believed like other Muslims that it was impossible for men to bring a like of the whole Qur'an; or its ten chapters, or even one chapter.

But, according to them, this inability of men was not based on the fact that the Qur'anic speech in itself was beyond the human power. The real reason was that Allah, by His predominant will and decree, has turned away and dissuaded would-be adversaries from bringing its like. Allah has done so to preserve and protect the sanctity of the prophethood.

This theory was totally wrong. This explanation is not in conformity with the clear import of the challenging verses. Allah says for example:

Or, do they say: "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring ten chapters like it forged and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful. "But if they do not answer you, then know that it is revealed by Allah's knowledge and that there is no god but He; will you then submit?" (11:13-14).

Ponder on the sentences, "then know that it is revealed by Allah's knowledge". The challenge was meant to prove that the Qur'an was a revelation; that it was not a speech forged by the Apostle; and that it was revealed by Allah's knowledge and not by the Satans. The same theme is found in the following verses:

Or, do they say: "He has forged it." Nay! they do not believe. Then let them bring a talk like it if they are truthful. (52:33-34).

And the Satans have not come down with it; and it behooves them not, and they have not the power to do (it). Most surely they are far removed from the hearing (of it) (26:210-212).

On the other hand, this theory of "turning away" implies that the reality of the Qur'an's miracle was not in its being a revelation from Allah; the miracle was that Allah prevented the people from bringing a like of

it. Again look at the verse:

Or, do they say: "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring a chapter like this and call whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." Nay, they have rejected that of which they have no comprehensive knowledge, and its final interpretation has not yet come to them . . . (10:38–39).

This verse clearly says that what made them helpless before the Qur'an, what made it impossible for them to bring a like of even one of its chapters, was the fact that it has a final interpretation whose knowledge is reserved for Allah – a knowledge which they lacked. It is this inherent quality of the Qur'an which vanquished the adversaries.

It was not that they had ability to bring its like but Allah prevented them from doing so. Then, there is the verse:

Do they not then meditate on the Qur'an? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82).

It shows that the miracle is in the inherent quality of the Qur'an that it was free from discrepancy in its words and meanings – because it is a quality which is not within the power of any creature – not that there was some discrepancy in this Book, but Allah prevented people from finding it out.

All these Qur'anic declarations prove that the theory of *as-sarf* has no leg to stand, and one should not take it seriously.

Now we come to the objections mentioned earlier. It is a fallacious argument that as the language is a product of human ingenuity, it can never reach a level which would be beyond the grasp or ability of human beings; language, being a product, cannot be more powerful than its producer. The fallacy lies in the fact that what has been invented by man is simple words for particular meanings.

But this congruity of the words with their meanings does not teach the man how to arrange those words, how to plan, draft and deliver a talk in the best possible way – in a way that the talk reflects the beauty of the meaning as it is in the mind, and the meaning in its turn becomes a mirror of the reality, remains in complete agreement with the fact.

It requires dexterity in the art of eloquence, adroitness in elocution; also it depends on sharp intelligence and comprehensive knowledge so that the speaker may be fully cognizant of all aspects of the subject matter. It is this skill and knowledge that differs from man to man, and creates difference between talk and talk in their respective perfection and beauty.

So, there are three aspects of a human talk; Knowledge of language – a man may be having the most comprehensive knowledge of the words of a language, without being able to speak it; elocutionary skill – a man may be the most accomplished orator, without being cognizant of material and spiritual realities; Knowledge of realities – a man may be the most learned scientist or theologian without having the ability

to express his views and meanings intelligibly.

These three factors may be found separately (as mentioned above) and may also combine together in some people. And on them depend the beauty and the eloquence of a speech.

The first factor – single words for their meanings – has been invented by social instinct of man. But the remaining two depend on intellectual refinement and delicate discernment.

Human perception, intelligence and discernment is limited and restricted. We cannot comprehend all the details of an event, all concomitants of a fact. As a result, we cannot be sure of being right at any time. Furthermore, we are gradually moving from deficiency to perfection, and so is our perception and discernment. Look at any spellbinding orator or enchanting poet; compare his earlier work with his latest and you will see the difference.

In this background, let us look at human speech – any human speech. First, we cannot be sure that it is free from errors of fact and judgment, because, as mentioned above, no speaker can have comprehensive knowledge of all the details and concomitants of an event.

Second, it will not be on the same level with speaker's former or later speech. Not only that: Even in the same speech the beginning will surely be on a level different from that of the end, although we, probably, will not be able to discern it because of the minuteness of difference.

Now, when we find a decisive speech, based on comprehensive knowledge, and free from all types of discrepancy, we will have to admit that it is not the work of a mortal man. This reality has been described in the following verses:

Do they not then meditate on the Qur'an? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82);

(I swear) by the heaven endued with rotation, and by the earth splitting (with plants etc.), most surely it is a decisive word, and it is not a jest (86:11-14).

Note the adjectives used for the heaven and the earth – they point to the constant changes occurring therein, because the oath is about a Book which is free from change and difference, inasmuch as it is based on an unchangeable and lasting reality, that is, its “interpretation”. (It is a Qur'anic terminology that will be explained in Ch. 3.)

Also, Allah says:

Nay! it is a glorious Qur'an, in a guarded tablet (85: 21-22) ;

(I swear) by the Book that makes manifest (the truth); surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand. And surely it is in the original of the Book with Us, truly elevated,

full of wisdom (43:2 -4);

But nay! (I swear) by the falling of stars; and most certainly it is a great oath if you only knew; most surely it is an honoured Qur'an, in a book that is hidden; none do touch it save the purified ones. A revelation by the Lord of the worlds (56:75 -80).

These and other similar verses show that the Qur'an is based on established realities that do not change, that are never altered. And, therefore, the Qur'an itself is safe from change, alteration and discrepancy.

To come back to the main objection: Accepted that language has been made by men. But it does not mean that there cannot be found a piece of literature that is beyond the reach of the very men who made the language. Otherwise, we would have to say that a sword-maker must be the bravest of all the swordsmen, the inventor of chess or lute must be the most accomplished chess-master or lutenist!

The perfect eloquence demands that, first, the word should be in complete harmony with the intended meaning, and, second, the conveyed meaning must be in accordance with the established fact. How the words fit the meanings?

The structural sequence of the words and their parts should perfectly agree with the natural order of the intended meaning and its parts – bringing the man-made language and sentences in total agreement with the nature. (See for details *Dala'ilu 'l-ijaz* of ash-Shaykh `Abdu 'l-Qahir al-Jurjan.)

As for the meaning, it must be correct and true, based on a real fact existing outside our imagination – and that fact should be of permanent value, unchangeable and unalterable. The first quality (the agreement of the word with meaning) depends on this basic quality of the meaning.

A very eloquent sweet-sounding jocular speech cannot stand before a serious talk; nor can an eloquent, serious speech – if it is based on wrong premises – be equal to a talk that reflects true facts and comprehensive wisdom.

A speech attains the highest standard of eloquence when its words are sweet, its style free-flowing, its meaning fitting the occasion and its conveyed proposition based on true facts.

Such a talk, based as it is on reality, can never differ with other realities; can never disagree with other truths. Truth and reality is a non-divisible entity. Truth cannot refute another truth; reality cannot oppose another reality.

Lie, on the other hand, may be in opposition to another lie as it surely is against the truth. Ponder on the verse:

. . . and what is there after the truth but error (10:32).

Note that truth is singular; there is no division in it. Again Allah says:

. . . and follow not (other) ways, for they will scatter you away from His ways . . . (6: 153).

Lie has many ways, it is not only disunited but also disuniting.

Obviously, there can be no difference whatsoever between one truth and the other; instead, there shall be total union and unison between them – one truth will lead to the other, one reality will guide to the other; thus, one part of the Qur'an confirms the others, one sentence testifies for the others.

It is a wonderful quality of the Qur'an. Take any verse; it is clear in its meaning; add to it another relevant verse equally clear; and you will find them together pointing to a new reality that was not shown by either verse separately: then put them side by side with a third relevant verse, and you will gain fresh insight into new sublime realities.

It is a unique quality of the Qur'an, and you will see many examples of this special characteristic in this book. Unfortunately the exegetes had so far neglected this method. Had they followed this way since the early days, they would have discovered by now so much of its hidden treasures.

This lengthy discourse was necessary to show that the two objections laid down against the Qur'anic miracle of eloquence were baseless. Miraculous eloquence is not based on words alone. Therefore, it is out of place to say that as it is man who had made the language, how can any speech be above the reach of the man himself?

Also, there is no room for the question that as only one out of many possible compositions can be the highest, how is it possible to express one idea in different ways, and then to claim that all were of miraculous standard?

Our foregoing explanation has made it clear that the miracle of eloquence depends on meaning – on its agreement with sublime unchangeable reality and on its conformity with the words.

The Reality Of Miracle According To The Qur'an

The Qur'an repeatedly asserts the occurrence of miracle – an unusual preternatural phenomenon, which shows the authority of metaphysical forces over the physical and material world. Miracle is not something against self-evident rational truth.

Some people have tried to explain away the verses that describe various miracles; their aim was to make the Qur'an fit the principles of modern physical sciences. But such attempts are unacceptable, as they are a forced burden on the language and the Qur'an.

We are going to explain, under various headings, what the Qur'an teaches us about the meaning and reality of miracle.

1. The Qur'an Confirms the General Rule of the Cause-and-Effect

The Qur'an says that in this natural world everything, every effect, has a cause; that there is a system of cause-and-effect permeating through this world. It is a self-evident reality; and on this truth depend the scientific and academic researches and discussions. Man by nature believes that there must be a cause for every natural phenomenon.

Likewise, academic researches try to find out relevant causes for all such happenings. What is a cause? It is such a thing, or a combination of things, that whenever it occurs, another thing – its effect – unfailingly comes into being.

We try to find out by experiments the causes of various things. For example, experience has taught us that if there is any burn, it must have been caused by fire, movement, friction or some such cause. A cause must be unfailable, comprehensive and universal. In other words, whenever and wherever the cause is found, its effect must be found.

This matter is clearly confirmed by the Qur'an. It takes this principle for granted when it talks about life, death, sustenance and other heavenly or earthly phenomena – although it ultimately ascribes all the effects, and their causes too, to Allah.

The Qur'an, therefore, confirms the general system of the cause-and-effect; whenever a cause is found (with all its necessary conditions) its effect must come into being, and whenever we see an effect, it surely and unfailingly proves the existence of its cause.

2. The Qur'an Affirms Miracle (Super-Natural Events)

The Qur'an, nevertheless, narrates many an event that goes against the normal, natural system of the cause-and-effect. It ascribes many super-natural miracles to various prophets, like Nūḥ, Hūd, Salih, Ibrāhīm, Lūṭ, Dawūd, Sulaymān, Mūsā, `Isa and Muhammad (peace of Allah be on them all!).

It should not be forgotten here that those events, although abnormal and uncustomary, were not inherently impossible; they were not like an assertion that 'A positive proposition and its opposite are affirmed together and are negated together'; or like a statement that 'A thing can be separated from its own self'; or that 'One is not a half of two'.

We instinctively know that such propositions are impossible, they cannot be. But the miracles shown by the prophets were not of this category; otherwise, the minds of untold billions of religionists, since the dawn of humanity, would not have accepted them and believed in them. No man accepts an inherently impossible statement, nor does any sane person ascribe such a thing to another.

Moreover, the effects that are called miracle, are not unknown to the nature. The natural world is continuously engaged in bestowing on the matter one form after the other, turning one event into

another, giving life to the dead, and death to the living, transforming the misfortune into fortune and the comfort into discomfort.

All this is happening daily in the world of nature; the only difference between a natural event and a miraculous one is in the speed and steps required to reach the goal. A natural cause brings about its effect, in special conditions, at a particular time and space, step by step in a long series of changes.

The matter present in a walking-stick may one day appear in a running serpent; a disintegrating skeleton may one day become a living man – but in its natural course it will take a very long time, under certain conditions of time and space, with numerous consecutive causes which would constantly change that particular matter from one form to the other, taking it from one step to the next and then to the third and so on, until it appears in the required shape and form.

In normal way, it cannot happen without its proper causes, without its necessary conditions; nor can it be brought into being by will-power of a human being. But when it comes to a miracle, it happens just by the will of the prophet, without any material cause and without any lapse of time.

Of course, it is very difficult for a simple mind – as it is for a scientific brain – to understand such super-natural events; man is, after all, accustomed to the natural-causality. On the other hand, no scientist can outright reject occurrence of super-natural phenomena even in this atomic age.

Every day someone or the other demonstrates his skill bringing some super-natural events about; people see it, radios and televisions broadcast it, newspapers and magazines publish it; and nobody says that it could not have happened as it was against the laws of nature.

Such phenomena have led many modern scholars to the theory that man, like everything else, is surrounded by unknown magnetic or electric currents; man may, through rigorous training, get control over the surrounding currents, and use them to affect other material things in abnormal and unusual ways, bringing those astonishing feats about.

If this theory is proved correct and all-inclusive, it will supersede all present theories that explain various happenings and effects in terms of motion and power; it will replace all previous causes with one all-pervasive natural cause: the magnetic currents.

This is their theory. They are right in their belief that every natural phenomenon must have a natural cause if the causal relationship between them is intact.

The Qur'an has not identified by name any all-pervasive natural cause that would explain all natural and super-natural events, as it is not within the main purposes of this divine book. But it affirms that every natural phenomenon has a natural cause – by permission of Allah.

In other words, every phenomenon is totally dependent on Allah, Who has appointed for it a certain procedure, a natural cause through which it gets its existence –the existence that is given by Allah. Allah

says:

and whoever fears Allah He will make for him an outlet, and give him sustenance from whence he thinks not; and whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah attains His purpose; Allah indeed has made a measure for everything (65:2-3) .

Its first sentence unreservedly declares that whoever fears Allah and has trust in Him, Allah is sufficient for him, and He will surely manage his affairs and make him succeed, even if in the normal way it may seem impossible, even if the material causes go against him. It is supported by the following verses:

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then verily I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me (2:186) ;

Call upon Me, I will answer you(40:60);

Is not Allah sufficient for His servant? (39:36).

The next sentence, “surely Allah attains His purpose”, explains the reason of the first declaration. The same theme is found in the verse:

. . . and Allah is predominant over His affair, but most people do not know (12:21).

This sentence too is all-inclusive and without any condition. Allah has His own way to let a thing happen, if He so wills – even if the normal ways are closed, even if usual paths to it are cut off.

This may possibly happen in two ways: First, Allah may bring that thing into being simply by His will, without resorting to any material or natural cause. Second, there may be an alternative natural cause, unknown to us, which Allah may have appointed for that phenomenon; it may be hidden from our eyes but the Maker and Creator, Who has prescribed it, knows it and uses it to attain His purpose.

This second possibility seems more appropriate in view of the last sentence, “Allah indeed has made a measure for everything.” This sentence shows that every effect, whether it is in accordance with the normal causality or not, has a measure appointed by Allah, is related to other beings, has a connection with other things; Allah may bring that effect into existence through any other related thing, even if the normal cause is absent.

What should not be forgotten is the basic fact that it is Allah Who has bestowed causality on a cause; this relation of cause and effect is not independent of Allah.

Allah has created causal relation between various things. He can attain His purpose through any way He wishes. No doubt, there is the system of cause-and-effect in the world; but this chain is in the hands of Allah, He may use it in any way He wills.

There is a real causal relation between a thing and the things that have preceded it; but that reality is not

as we know it – that is why no academic or scientific theory is capable of explaining all phenomena of the world; it is really as Allah knows, makes and manages it.

This basic principle has been referred to in the verses of “decree” or “measure”:

And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure (15:21).

Surely We have created every thing according to a measure (54:49);

. . . and Who created every thing, then ordain for it a measure (25:2).

Who created then made complete, and Who made (things) according to a measure then guided (them to their goal) (87:2 - 3) .

Look also at the following verses:

No misfortune befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence (57:22).

No affliction comes about but by Allah's permission; and whoever believes in Allah, He guides aright his heart; and Allah is Cognizant of all things (64:11).

These verses (and especially the first) show that the things take their particular identity in accordance with a measure appointed for it by Allah; that measure gives it its individuality and defines it; and that measure and definition precedes the thing and then accompanies it. A thing can be properly delineated only if it is seen in its perspective, clearly defining its relation to all other things.

The other related things serve as a mould that gives this item its peculiar shape and particular form. Every material effect is connected with all things which precede or accompany it. All such things together serve as the cause of this effect; and this one in its turn becomes a part of the cause of other effects that come later.

Also, it may be proved from the following two verses:

That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of every thing. . . (40:62) ;

. . . there is no living creature but He holds it by its forelock; surely my Lord is on the straight path(11:56).

Add to them the fact that the Qur'an confirms the general system of causality –and you will find the complete picture displayed before your eyes.

1. The first verse says that every thing is created by Allah, and the second one states that creation is on

a single pattern; there is no deviation in it as that would cause chaos and disturbance.

2. The Qur'an confirms the general system of causality for all material things.

3. It follows that every material thing and effect is invariably always created by a cause – a cause that precedes it and brings it into being. It makes no difference whether it is a normal and usual cause, or a supernatural one. There must always be a cause.

4. Many usual causes which sometimes fail to bring about the expected effects are not the real causes. The real causes are those which never fail to create the expected effects. An example may be given of various diseases and their causes; influenza was previously thought to be caused by cold; but cold did not always create it, now it has been discovered that it is caused by a virus. The same is true about many supernatural feats.

3. Whatever is Caused by Natural Causes is Really Caused by Allah

The Qur'an, while affirming the causal relation between a cause and its effect, ascribes every effect to Allah. The inference is that these normal and usual causes are not independent in creating their effects; the real cause, in the true sense of this word, is only Allah.

Allah says:

- ***surely His is the creation and the command (7:54);***
- ***Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's (2:284);***
- ***His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth (57:5);***
- ***Say: "All is from Allah" (4:78).***

There are numerous such verses showing that everything belongs exclusively to Allah; He may deal with it in any way He likes; no one else can handle it at all except by permission of Allah; He allows whomsoever He wishes to manage, influence and effect it to a certain extent. But this divine permission, establishing the relation of causality, does not make that cause independent of Allah; it is just a permission given by the real owner to use his property.

The man having this permission cannot transgress the limits imposed by the owner. Allah says:

- ***Say: "O Allah, Master of kingdom! Thou givest the kingdom to whomsoever thou pleasest and takest away the kingdom from whomsoever Thou pleasest (3:26);***
- ***Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal) (2:50) ;***
- ***. . . whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede***

with Him but by His permission? (2:255);

• . . . and He is firmly established on Arsh, regulating the affair; there is no intercessor except after His permission (10:3).

The causes do have the causality because Allah has given it to them. They have got it, but are not independent of Allah. It is this factor that has been described in above verses as “intercession” and “permission”. Permission means that there was an impediment which, but for this permission would have hindered the now–authorized agent from interfering in this affair.

In short, every cause has been given the power to create the relevant effect; but the real authority is yet in the hands of Allah.

4. The Souls of the Prophets do have Influence Over the Super–Natural Events

Allah says:

. . . and it was not meet for an apostle that he should bring a sign except with Allah's permission; but when the command of Allah came, judgement was given with truth, and those who treated (it) as a lie were lost (40:78).

The verse shows that it was the apostle who brought the sign – by permission of Allah. The souls of the prophets were given a special power to cause the miracle; and that causal power, like all other causes, created its effect with permission of Allah.

Again Allah says:

And they followed what the Satans chant (of sorcery) against the kingdom of Sulayman; and not that Sulayman disbelieved, but (it was) the Satans that disbelieved, they taught men sorcery and what was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut: Yet these two taught no one until they had said, “Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever”. Even then men learned from these two that by which they might cause a separation between a man and his wife; and they cannot hurt with it anyone except with Allah's permission (2: 102).

This verse proves two things: magic has some reality; and it, not unlike miracle, is caused by a psychical factor of the magician, by permission of Allah.

Take a miracle, a magic, a mysterious wonder of a saint, or a spell–bringing skill acquired through rigorous practice – all these extra–ordinary or super–natural deeds emanate from their agents' psychical factors – or will–power – as the above–mentioned verses have shown.

But Allah has made it clear that the psychical cause found in His apostles, prophets and believers is predominant, has the mastery, over all other causes, in all imaginable conditions; it can never be

overpowered. Allah says:

And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the apostles: Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones (37:171–173).

Allah has written down: I will most certainly prevail, I and My apostle . . . (58:21).

Most surely We help Our apostles and those who believe, in this world's life and on the day when the witnesses shall stand (40:51).

As you see, these verses do not put any condition or restriction on the promised victory; the apostles and the believers shall be victorious over their adversaries in all conditions and situations.

It may be inferred from it that this divine source is something metaphysical, preternatural. Material things are, in their nature, measured and limited; they get the worst of it if they are faced by another thing which is superior in power. But this preternatural spiritual source, which is assisted by the will of Allah, is never defeated by any factor; whenever it is faced by any material adversary, it is given by Allah a far more superior power to achieve victory with flying colours.

5. Whatever is Caused by Psychical Power Depends on a Command from Allah

Read again the last sentence of the verse 40:78, mentioned at the beginning of the preceding chapter:

“but when the command of Allah came, judgement was given with truth, and those who treated (it) as a lie were lost”.

You will see that the supernatural event caused by the psychical power of the agent depends on a command from Allah – in addition to His permission. That command may coincide with the said permission, or may be one with it. The command of Allah is His creation, described by the word 'Be' in the verse:

His command, when He intends anything, is only that He says to it, “Be”, and it is (36:82).

Also Allah says:

Surely this is a reminder, so whoever wishes takes to his Lord a way. And you do not wish except that Allah wishes; surely Allah is Knowing, Wise (76:29–30).

It is naught but a reminder for the worlds, for him among you who wishes to go straight. And you do not wish except that Allah wishes, the Lord of the worlds (81:27–29).

These verses show that the affairs which are within the sphere of the man's will, and under his control and authority, are still dependent on the divine will for their existence. What these verses say is this: The

intentional actions of a man are done by his will; but that will itself depends on the will of Allah.

The verses do not say that whatever is wished by man is wished by Allah. Had it been the case, no human wish would have remained unfulfilled – because it would have become the will of Allah! Also, many verses refute this idea;

And if We had wished We would certainly have given to every soul its guidance . . . (32:13).

And if your Lord had wished surely all those who are in the earth would have believed (10:99).

Our will depends on the divine will; our action depends on our will, and also they depend – indirectly, through our will – on the will of Allah. And both our will and action depend on the command of Allah – on His word, “Be”.

Things, affairs and events may be either natural or supernatural; and the super-natural may be either on the side of good, like miracle, or on that of evil, like magic and sooth saying. But all of them come into being through natural causes, and at the same time they depend on the will of Allah. In other words, they cannot come into being unless the natural cause coincides, or becomes one, with the permission and command of Allah.

All things are equal in this respect; but when a prophet brings about a miracle, or a good servant of Allah prays to Him for a thing, an additional factor, that is, the decisive command of Allah, is added thereto; and the desired effect or event unfailingly comes into being. Allah says:

Allah has written down: I will most certainly prevail, I and My apostles (58:21) ;

I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me. . . (2:186).

See also other such verses quoted in the preceding chapter.

6. The Qur'an Attributes the Miracle to an Invincible Cause

The preceding chapters have made it clear that miracle, like other natural and super-natural things, needs a natural cause; and that all causes depend on some metaphysical causes. All these events and effects may, thus, be divided into four categories:

First: The normal events: They come into being by normal apparent causes which are accompanied by real causes – in most cases those real causes are material ones; and those causes depend on the divine will and command.

Second: The extra-ordinary events of evil nature, like sorcery and sooth saying: They are caused by natural but unusual and abnormal causes, which are accompanied by the real causes; and those causes depend on the divine permission and will.

Third: The extra-ordinary events of good nature, like a prayer answered by Allah: They are caused by the natural and real cause, with permission and will of Allah – but such events do not contain any element of challenge, that is, they do not purport to prove the truth of any call or claim.

Fourth: The miracles: The extra-ordinary, super-natural events of good character, which are brought about as a challenge, to prove the truth of the call or claim. They too are caused by the natural and real causes with permission and will of Allah.

The third and fourth categories have an extra quality in them: Their cause is fortified by an invincible factor; it can never be overpowered, as it is always accompanied by the decisive command of Allah.

Question: It is strange to say that miracle is caused by a natural cause. Suppose, we discover the real natural cause of a miracle; will it not then be possible for us to create that miracle? If yes, then miraculousness would be a relative matter; any action would be a miracle in the eyes of those who are unaware of its cause, but quite an ordinary thing for those who know.

In the same way, an event that was believed to be a miracle in dark ages would not be so impressive in this age of science and knowledge. If scientific research found out the real natural causes of the miracles, there would be no miracle at all – and no miracle could be used to prove the truth of the prophet's claim.

What all this leads to is this: A miracle is not a proof except against him who is ignorant of its natural cause; therefore, it cannot be put as an evidence of the truth of the prophet's claim.

Reply: Miraculousness of a miracle does not depend on unknowability of its cause; nor is it a miracle because it emanates from an extraordinary or mysterious cause. It is a miracle because it is brought about by such an extraordinary cause which is invincible, which cannot be overcome, cannot be defeated.

Let us look at the case of a seriously sick person, who, all of a sudden, is cured by the prayers of a believer. It is called a miraculous event, because it emanates from an invincible cause. We know that patient could be cured by medical treatment, and it would have been a normal process; but this cause, that is, the medical treatment, could be foiled by other more powerful factors; and that is why it is not called a miracle.

7. The Qur'an Counts Miracle as a Proof of the Truth of the Claim of Prophethood

Question: What is the connection between miracle and veracity of the claim of prophethood? Reason fails to see any binding relation between the two. But the Qur'an time and again asserts this concomitancy, as may be seen in the stories of various prophets, for example, Hūd, Salih, Mūsā, `Isa and Muhammad (peace of Allah be on all of them!).

The Qur'an narrates that no sooner did they announce their claim than they were asked by their people to bring some miracle to prove the truth of their claim; and they responded to it by showing the miracle.

Not only that. Some of them were given their miracle even before their nations had asked them for it. Allah told M^usa (a.s.) at the start of his mission:

Go you and your brother with My signs and be not remiss in remembering Me (20:42).

And He says about `Isa (a.s.):

And (will make him) an apostle to the children of Israel: "That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life with Allah's permission and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your house; most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers"(3:49).

The same is the position of the Qur'an which was given to the Prophet right at the start of his mission. The reason does not see any connection whatsoever between the truth of the message of an apostle or a prophet on one hand and his ability to show a super-natural sign on the other.

Moreover, the beauty of the principles expounded by the apostles and the prophets, strengthened as it is by irrefutable proofs, dispenses with the need of any miracle – for an intelligent and knowledgeable person. That is why it is said that miracles are needed for convincing the simple-minded people, because they cannot understand a learned discourse; but knowledgeable persons do not need them.

Reply: The prophets had not brought the miracles to prove any principle of religion, like belief in Oneness of God and the Day of Resurrection etc. – the truth of which could be realized by intellect and reason. They always proved such things with reasoning and logical arguments.

For example, Allah says regarding the existence of the Creator:

Their apostles said: "Is there doubt about Allah, the Master of the heavens and the earth?" (14:10);

and He says about resurrection:

And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain; that is the opinion of those who disbelieve; then woe to those who disbelieve on account of the fire. Shall We treat those who believe and do good like the mischief-makers in the earth? Or shall We make those who guard (against evil) like the wicked? (38:27-28).

Why were, then, the apostles asked to show miracle, and why did they bring it about? It was to prove that they were in fact sent by Allah; it was meant to authenticate their claim.

The prophets claimed that they were sent by Allah, that He had revealed His message to them – either directly or through an angel. It was an assertion of a super-natural event; a claim of a reality beyond the physical senses and mental cognization of their people; a fact above the level of man's perception.

If that claim was right, it would be a special metaphysical disposition reserved for the prophets only. The difficulty was that the prophets were like any other human being in their humanity and in its characteristics. How could they be favoured for this especial relationship with the world beyond nature?

The disbelievers, therefore, resorted to two methods to disprove the prophets' claim:

First Method: They tried to refute it through such “arguments” as the following:

a) ***They said: “You are nothing but human being like us; you wish to turn us away from what our fathers used to worship” (14: 10).***

The apostles were like all other men; and other men do not receive such divine revelation as was claimed by the apostles. If they could be given revelation from God, why could not others get it as well? Were not all of them alike in their humanity?

The apostles replied to it in these words:

Their apostles said to them: “We are nothing but human beings like yourselves, but Allah bestows (His) favours on whom He pleases of His servants. . . “ (14:11) .

They accepted that they were like all men in their humanity, but showed that apostleship was a very especial favour of Allah, and He bestows it on whom He pleases. It is not difficult to see that being alike does not preclude some of them from being reserved for some especial favours. Of course, if Allah had pleased, He could have bestowed it on anyone among them, but He chose for this favour whom He pleased. The same was the thrust of their protest against the Prophet:

“Has the reminder been revealed to him from among us?” (38:8)

b) Of the same nature, but with added sarcasm, were the following remarks of the polytheists of Mecca:

And they say: “Why was not this Qur'an revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?” (43:31)

And they say: “What sort of apostle is this that he eats food and goes about in the marts; why has not an angel been sent down to him so that he be a warner with him? Or a treasure be thrown down to him, or be for him a garden from which he may eat!” (25:7-8)

What they wanted to say was this: If the Apostle (of Islam) really has been chosen by God to receive divine revelation, then he must be someone above all the mortals. Then why does he require food to eat, and why is he obliged to go about in the markets to earn his livelihood?

If he is truly a representative of God, he should have been accompanied by an angel to assist him in his work, or he should have been given a treasure to save him the trouble of earning his livelihood in the markets, or a garden should have been bestowed on him, so that he would not need a food like ours.

Allah answered them in these words:

See how they coin comparisons for thee! So they have gone astray, therefore they shall not be able to find a way . . . And We did not send before thee any messengers but they most surely ate food and went about in the markets; and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is Ever-seeing (25:9,20).

And in reply to their demand for sending down an angel, it was said in another chapter:

And if We had made him angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and We would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused (6:9).

c) Going further, they raised their demands even higher:

And those who do not hope for Our meeting, say: "Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?" Now certainly they are too proud of themselves and have revolted a great revolt (25:21).

According to their thinking, there was no difference between them and the Prophet; all were human beings. Then why should he be reserved for this office of apostleship? They too should be visited by angels; or, even better, they should see the Lord. Allah replied to them:

On the day when they shall see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty, and they shall say: "It is a forbidden thing totally prohibited" (25:22).

It means that if they persist in their disbelief, they shall not see the angels except at the time of death, and then they shall not find any joy in it. The same thing has been mentioned in another verse:

And they say: "O you to whom the Reminder has been revealed! you are most surely insane. Why do you not bring to us the angels if you are of the truthful ones?" We do not send the angels but with truth, and then they would not be respited (15:6-8).

d) This last verse shows us one more twist of their "arguments". The Prophet, according to their thinking, was truthful in his claim of revelation, but he was insane; whatever news he brought was a product of his unstable mind and was, therefore, not correct. The same "argument" was put against Nūh (a.s.), as the Qur'an says:

. . . and they called (Nūh) mad, and he was driven away (54:9).

These were the variations of their "arguments" against the claims of the Prophet, the arguments which

were based on similarity of the prophets and their people in their humanity.

Second Method: It was to reject outright the claim of the prophets, and demand from them proof of their veracity, asking them to bring some signs to show that they were in fact representatives of Allah and recipients of His revelation.

The apostles and the prophets claimed a distinction which was intangible and unknowable to their people. They claimed that they were given apostleship and /or prophethood; that they were spoken to by Allah – either directly or through angels. Now, such a claim could not be verified by any test or experiment. It could be objected against in two ways:

(i) There was no proof that such a claim was true; (ii) there was proof that it was not true. Revelation, divine speech, (and the resulting *sharāḥ* and religious discipline) could not be experienced by anyone other than the claimant; the normal system of cause and effect was against it. If such a claim were true, it would mean that the Prophet was in direct contact with the world beyond nature; he was tuned to the divine power – the power that can change the course of nature can make the effect appear without their usual causes.

In that case, he should be able to produce some another tangible super-natural effect; after all one super-natural event is like any other super-natural event so far as the divine authority is concerned. If Allah spoke to the Prophet – a super-natural effect – He should show on his hands some other tangible super-natural effects in order to prove the truth of his former claim, that is, the claim that he receives revelation from God.

If God wanted to guide the people aright by means of a super-natural thing, that is, revelation, then let Him prove the truth of His Prophet by means of another super-natural, that is, miracle.

That was why the people asked for miracles whenever a prophet was sent to them. They wanted miracles to verify his claim of prophethood, and not to ensure the truth of his teachings. Suppose a man is sent by a ruler to his subjects with his commands and laws. He reaches his destination and they ask him for his credentials.

Will they be satisfied if, at this juncture, he starts explaining the wisdom underlying each rule and regulation? Certainly not. They will say: All that you have said, just shows that these rules are based on wisdom and meant for our good; but it does not prove in any way that they are from our ruler, nor that you are his deputy authorized to manage our affairs on his behalf.

We shall believe in your claim only when you show us a credential to this effect, for example, an appointment letter duly signed by the ruler and having his official seal. It is as the polytheists had said to the Prophet:

“. . . until you bring down to us a book which we may read” (17:93).

From the above explanation, two things become abundantly clear.

First: Miracle has an inseparable. Connection with the truth of the claim of prophethood. Learned and ignorant, elite and common, all men need miracle in order to be able to accept the truth of a prophet's claim.

Second: What the prophet receives and perceives of the revelation is entirely different from those things which we feel by senses or comprehend by intellect. In plain words, revelation is not a function of mind; it is a reality totally separate from “right thinking”.

This fact is brilliantly clear from the Book of Allah; and no one, having an iota of common sense, can entertain any doubt about it. But in recent times some “scholars” have closed their eyes from this reality, and tried to reinterpret the spiritual facts and divine knowledge in the light of the natural sciences.

They have, accordingly, based their explanations on materialistic theory. They believe that human perception and comprehension is a characteristic of matter, emanating from the brain. They are of the opinion that all real merits and perfections – whether of an individual or of a group – are developments of matter only. Based on these premises, they have explained prophethood and all related spiritual factors on the following materialistic lines:

Prophethood is a sort of a sharp mental power, an intellectual genius. The genius who is called prophet, looks at the social conditions of his nation; analyses what they have inherited of the beliefs, ideas, customs and superstitions; and then changes them to conform with the needs of his time and place, in the most suitable manner.

In that light, he frames for them the basic social principles and ordains practical rules and regulations – in order to raise their standard of life, to elevate their morality and ethics, to make them better members of society. Basing on this hypothesis, they have declared that:

- 1) Prophet is an intellectual genius, who calls his people to the good of their social life.
- 2) Revelation is the good thought which comes into his mind.
- 3) Divine book is the collection of those good thoughts and ideas, inasmuch as they are free from personal desires and selfish motives.
- 4) Angels who, the prophet says come to him, are only the natural material forces which keep the world going. Or, they are psychological traits which lead the man to his perfection. The Holy Ghost is a higher development of those material forces, which rains those pure ideas on the prophet's mind.

Satan is a retrogression of the same material forces, which poisons the minds with evil thoughts and incites the people to anti-social deeds. In the same vein they have explained away all the realities which the prophets have told us about – like the Tablet, the Pen, the Throne, the Chair, the Book, the

Reckoning, the Garden, and the Fire.

5) Religions are products of times; they change with the times.

6) The miracles, attributed to the prophets, are nothing more than myths and fictions; which were forged in the interest of religion, to strengthen the belief of common people; or to enhance the prestige of religious leaders in the eyes of their followers.

This in short is their explanation. But prophethood, in this meaning, should rather be called a political device than a divine reality. It is not possible here to throw light on its various facets. What the readers, however, should not overlook is that this interpretation has no resemblance whatsoever to what has been described in the Books of Allah and the Tradition of the prophets.

What led these “scholars” to such interpretations was their total submission to materialistic theories; that was why they rejected every metaphysical reality, and tried to bring it down to the level of lifeless matter.

Such peoples are academic descendants of an earlier group: Many early theologians interpreted every religious reality – the Throne, the Chair, the Tablet, the Pen, the Angels etc. – in material terms, adding, at the same time, that those things existed beyond the grasp of our senses. Needless to say that that interpretation was not based on any actual experiment or sensual perception.

Now that the area of physical sciences has expanded so much, and every thing is being analyzed, tested and experimented on, this later generation was obliged to reject the idea of physical existence of those religious realities, because, as mentioned above, their existence could not be proved by any test or experiment.

Therefore, they had to invent other meanings for those realities, well within the area of sensual perception. They thought that they were serving the cause of religion in this way – because their interpretation would bring those realities within the sensual and physical recognition, and thus save them from being totally rejected by modern scholars.

Both groups have strayed from the right path. The ancient theologians correctly understood the meanings of these words, without resorting to any allegorical interpretation. But they erred when they thought that those were material things although beyond the purview of sensual perception, not subjected to the laws of matter.

The modern scholars took the wrong way from the very start; they gave these words wrong meanings in their eagerness to make them conform to material realities; in their attempt to pull these sublime truths down to the level of physical experience.

The correct way is to explain these words according to the dictates of the language and the usage; then shall come the stage of identifying what, how and where, for example, the Pen is. This should be done with the help of other relevant verses. After the Pen is identified, it may be compared with current

scientific ideas to check whether it goes against them.

If that examination reveals that the identified entity was beyond the domain of matter, then it should not be proved, or disproved, by the principles of physical sciences. The science is concerned with material and physical things.

What authority has it got to judge metaphysical or spiritual things? Can we allow a linguist to prove, or disprove, a proposition of astronomy by the rules of grammar? If not, then why should the rules of physical sciences be applied to prove, disprove or interpret metaphysical realities?

Qur'an

But if you do (it) not – and never shall you do (it) –then be on guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers. And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are gardens in which rivers flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: “This is what was given to us before;– and they shall be given the like of it, and they shall have pure mates in them; and in them they shall abide.

The chapter began with description of three groups: the pious ones, the disbelievers and the hypocrites. But then all of them were joined together by the words, “O men!”, calling them to worship Allah.

In this context, they could be divided in two groups only: those who answered this call (i.e. the believers) and those who did not answer it (i.e. the disbelievers). The hypocrites do not come into this picture, probably because in their appearance they are with the first group, while in reality they are included in the second. Perhaps, that is why the previous designation of the first group (*those who guard against evil*) has been changed here for “those who believe”.

“*al-Waqud*” (الوقود) is fuel. The verse says that man himself is the fuel of the hell. He is his own fuel, to keep the fire burning, and to get himself burned in that fire. Allah says:

then in the fire shall they be burned (40:72).

It is the fire kindled by Allah, which rises above the hearts (104:6-7).

Man shall be burned in a fire that will be kindled and fueled by his own self.

The next verse, 2:25, runs parallel to it and we find the same principle at work here also: “whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: `This is what was given to us before;’¹ and they shall be given the like of it”. It indicates that man shall get there only what he has himself prepared here.

The Prophet has said: “As you live so you will die, and as you die so you will be raised.” But the people of the paradise have a pleasant distinction vis-à-vis the people of the fire, because they shall be given

ever-increasing rewards by their Lord:

They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet (50:35).

“. . . Of which men and stones are the fuel”: The stones referred to here are the idols which the disbelievers worshipped. Allah says:

Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of hell . . . (21:98).

“. . . they shall have pure mates in them”: The adjective “pure”, inasmuch as it qualifies the “mates”, refers to purity from all such things as may create aversion and unpleasantness – whether in their bodies or in their behavior. In other words, the mates given to the believers in paradise will be free from every disagreeable characteristic or trait.

Tradition

as-Sadiq narrates that as-Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about this verse and he said: “The pure mates are the ones who shall be free from menstruation and other excrements.”

The Author says: Some other Tradition have expanded the meaning to include cleanliness from all defective traits, all characteristics causing aversion.

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