

## Suratul Baqarah: Verses 102 103

(١٠٢) وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ ۗ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ الْمَلَائِكَةِ بِبَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ ۗ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ ۗ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۗ ۗ ۗ  
فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ ۗ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ ۗ وَزَوْجِهِ ۗ وَمَا هُم بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ ۗ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ ۗ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ ۗ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ ۗ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ ۗ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۗ ۗ ۗ  
لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

(١٠٣) وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ ۗ لَّو كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

*And they followed what the satans chanted (of sorcery) against the kingdom of Sulayman; and Sulayman was not an unbeliever, but the satans 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 any one except with Allah's permission; and they learned what harmed them and did not profit them; and certainly they knew that he who bought it should have no share (of good) in the hereafter, and vile was the price for which they sold their souls; had they but known (this) (102).*

**And if they had believed and guarded themselves** (against evil), **reward from Allah would certainly have been better; had they but known** (this) (103).

## Commentary

**Qur'an: And they followed what the satans chanted...** The exegetes have disputed among themselves about each and every aspect of this verse; so much so that the resulting picture of the differences is almost unparalleled in the whole Qur'an. A list of the differences is given below:

“they followed ”: Does the pronoun, “they”, refer to the Jews of the Sulayman's time, or to those at the time of the Prophet, or to all?

“chanted”: The Arabic word is “*tatlu*” ( تَتْلُوا ) which may be translated as “chanted”, “recited”, “told a lie about”, “faked” or “followed and acted according to”. In which sense the word is used here? Every meaning has some supporters.

“satans”: Does it refer to the satans of *jinn*? Or to those among the human beings? Or to both?

“about”: The Arabic participle is “*'ala*” ( عَلَى ) = against, on, about, upon). Does the phrase mean, about the kingdom of Sulayman? Or, during the reign of Sulayman? Or, against his kingdom? Or, on his reign?

“the satans disbelieved”: Some say, they disbelieved because they published the sorcery among the people. Others say, they disbelieved because they ascribed the sorcery to Sulayman. Still others say, the disbelief, as mentioned here, actually means sorcery.

“they taught men sorcery”: It means they instructed them as a teacher instructs his students. No! it means that they buried the chants under Sulayman's chair, and then directed the men to it who brought it out and learnt it.

“and what was sent down”: The word translated here as “what” is “*ma*” ( مَا ) which is a relative pronoun (“what”); also, it is a particle of negation (“not”). “And” is mostly used as a conjunctive; but not infrequently, it is also used to begin a new sentence. A group says that “*ma*” means “what”, and the conjunctive joins it to “what the satans chanted” (the Jews followed what was sent down).

Another party is of the opinion that the conjunctive joins it to “sorcery” (the satans taught them sorcery and that which was sent down). A third group thinks that “*ma*” means “not”, and the word “and” begins a new sentence (And sorcery was not sent down to the two angels, contrary to what the Jews claimed).

“sent down”: Was it sent down from the heavens? Or from the highlands?

“the two angels”: They were the angels from the heaven. No! They were two good men, or men who feigned to be good. No! It is not “*al-malakayn*” ( الْمَلَائِكَيْنِ = two angels); it is “*al-malikayn*” ( الْمَلِكَيْنِ = two kings).

“Babylon”: It is the famous ancient city of Iraq. No! It is a city in Damawand (Iran); Wrong! It is the land between Nasibayn (Turkey) and Ra'sul 'Ayn.

“these two taught no one”: Teaching is used in its common meaning of instruction. No! It means, these two apprised no one.

“do not be a disbeliever”: By learning sorcery? Or, by practising it? Or, by both?

“the men learned from these two”: The “two” refers to the two angels. No! It means, they learned from the two subjects, sorcery and disbelief. Wrong! They learned the practice of sorcery, in place of the advice given by the angels.

“that by which they might cause a separation between a man and his wife”: Some exegetes say that they caused love or hate between the couple with the help of their sorcery. Others think that they misled one of the spouses to disbelief and polytheism, and the apostasy caused the separation mentioned here. A third group say that they created hatred and enmity between the couple with their calumny and slander.

This, in short, gives a glimpse of the differences of opinions concerning the explanations of the words and clauses of the verse. There are still more differences about the event referred to – whether it narrates an actual happening or is just a parable; and so on and so forth. Compute the differences mentioned above and you will get nearly one million and two hundred sixty thousand possible explanations (4 x 3 9 x 2 4)!!

It seems an astounding quality of the Qur'an, that a verse that is subjected to so many divergent interpretations, still maintains its highest standard of eloquence; that in spite of all these vagaries of the exegetes, its meaning is not disjointed, nor its beauty marred.

A similar treatment has been meted out to the verse:

***Is he then who has with him clear proof from his Lord, and a witness from him recites it and before it (is) the Book of Musa, a guide and a mercy (11:17).***

However, it appears from the context that this verse deals with a hitherto unmentioned affair of the Jews, that is, their wide-spread use of sorcery. They based this practice on one or two stories, which were very popular among them.

The Jews were addicted to making alterations and interpolations in, and omissions from, their Divine books, let alone the historical narrations. They used to change their books and records fitting them to the prevalent moods of their times. A story narrated by them was not to be relied upon. But this Qur'anic admonition is based on their own belief, because it was they who used to narrate these stories.

The verse proves that the practice of sorcery was prevalent among the Jews, and that they ascribed it to

Sulayman (a.s.). They presumed that Sulayman (a.s.) got the kingdom and subjugated the *jinn*, the human beings, the animals and the birds – all with the help of sorcery; and all the supernatural miraculous events related to him depended on witchcraft.

And they claimed that some of the enchantments in their hands had come down to them from him. The remaining portion was attributed to the two angels at Babylon, named Harut and Marut.

The Qur'an refutes the stories, saying that the prophet Sulayman (a.s.) never indulged in witchcraft and sorcery. How could he, when sorcery was nothing but disbelief in Allah? Sulayman (a.s.) could not be an unbeliever as he was a sinless, innocent prophet. All this is clearly seen from the words of Allah:

“and Sulayman was not an unbeliever, but the satans disbelieved, they taught men sorcery”; “and certainly they knew that he who bought it should have no share (of good) in the hereafter”. Sulayman's position was too distinguished, his rank too high, and his name too sacred to be associated with disbelief and sorcery.

He was the prophet whose outstanding position has been eulogized in several places in the chapters of Meccan period, long before this Chapter of the Cow was revealed. See, for example, the chapters of the Cattle (6th), the Prophets (21st), the Ant (27th) and Sad (38th).

You shall find therein that Sulayman (a.s.) was an excellent servant of Allah, a prophet and an apostle; Allah gave him the knowledge and the wisdom; and granted him a kingdom which was not fit for any one after him.

Obviously, Sulayman could not indulge in sorcery; it was just a mythical story invented by the satans, which they dictated to their human friends; and it was the satans who disbelieved because they misguided the men by teaching them sorcery.

As for the story of the two angels at Babylon, the Qur'anic stand is as follows:

The two angels, Harut and Maria, were certainly given some sorcery as a means of test and trial for the human beings – and no objection could be raised against that; after all, Allah has taught the human nature the ways of evil too in order that He may test them with it.

Likewise, sorcery was sent down to the two angels; but they did not teach it to anyone until they had said to him: Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not become a disbeliever by using it for wrongful purposes; you must use it only to nullify the effect of witchcraft, to expose the viles of the sorcerers and things like that.

But the men learned from them that by which they might destroy the domestic peace and turn the love between husband and wife – the best of the things ingrained in human nature – into hatred, causing a separation between them. Also they learned what harmed them and did not benefit them.

The verse therefore may be explained as follows:

And they (i.e., the Jews coming after the reign of Sulayman – every generation passing on the legacy to the later one) followed what the satans from among the *jinn* faked and lied about the kingdom of Sulayman.

“*Tatlu*” (تَتَلُّوْا) = translated here as recited or chanted) actually has the connotation of “lied about” or “faked about”, because it is followed by the preposition “*‘ala*” (عَلَى) = on) which has changed its semantic value.

Why do we say that the satans were from the *jinn*? The following two verses read together provide the answer to this question:

***And of the satans there were those who dived for him and did other work beside that, and We kept guard over them*** (21:82);

***and when he fell down, the jinn came to know plainly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have tarried in abasing torment*** (34: 14).

The first verse shows that the satans were reduced to subjection by Sulayman (a.s.) who kept them away from mischief by assigning to them very heavy task; and the second verse refers to the same slavish group as the *jinn*.

**Qur’an: *and Sulayman was not an unbeliever***: “and” is used here in the meaning of “while”. Sulayman did not indulge in sorcery; therefore, it was not he who disbelieved; rather it was the satans who disbelieved, because they misled the people by teaching them sorcery.

**Qur’an: *and what was sent down***: The Jews followed that which was sent down – through inspiration – to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. Yet these two did not teach any one any thing of the sorcery, without warning him not to practice it.

They admonished every one who wanted to learn sorcery: Surely we are only a trial for you. What we teach you is but a means of test for you. Beware! Don't become an unbeliever by practising sorcery.

**Qur’an: *Even then men learned from these two***: that is, from the two angels, Harut and Maria. “that by which they might cause a separation”, that is, the sorcery which caused separation “between a man and his wife”.

**Qur’an: *and they cannot hurt with it any one except with Allah's permission***: It is a parenthetic sentence, to remove a possible misunderstanding: One could assume, on hearing that the sorcerers caused separation between a husband and his wife, that the sorcerers were powerful enough to disturb the divinely ordained arrangement of the world; that they could undo the Divine Decree and change the system created by Allah.

This sentence clears the air and emphasizes the fact that sorcery draws its strength from the Divine Decree; it cannot affect any thing but with the permission of Allah. Therefore, the sorcerers act within the framework of the system designed by Allah.

This sentence was placed where it is because only the preceding sentence (***that by which they might cause a separation...***) mentions the effect of sorcery. Therefore, it was explained that whatever effect it had was based on the permission of Allah.

The following clause (***and they learned what harmed them and did not profit them***) is not concerned with this aspect of sorcery, and the above-mentioned clarifying parenthetical sentence, if placed after it, would have looked out of place.

**Qur'an: *and certainly they knew that he who bought it should have no share (of good) in the hereafter:*** They knew it because their reason and intellect told them that the sorcery was the most wicked source of disorder in the society. Also, they were made aware of it by Musa (a.s.) when he had said:

***and the magician shall not be successful wheresoever he may come from*** (20:69).

**Qur'an: *and vile was the price for which they sold their souls; had they but known (this):*** They knew that sorcery was bad for them and ruinous for their future abode; yet it was as though they did not know it – because they did not act according to their knowledge. If a knowledge fails to lead the knower to the straight path, then it is not knowledge; it is ignorance.

Allah says:

***Have you then seen him who takes his low desire for his god, and Allah has made him err in spite of (his) knowledge...*** (45:23).

Therefore, it was completely in order to wish for them know-ledge and guidance, even if they had had the knowledge before.

**Qur'an: *And if they had believed and guarded themselves....:*** If they had followed the dictates of belief and piety, instead of following the satans' yarns and practising sorcery which is nothing short of disbelief, they would have got its reward from Allah.

This verse indicates that the disbelief emanating from sorcery is a disbelief within the sphere of action, like that which results from withholding *zakat*; it is not a disbelief within the sphere of faith. Had the sorcery been a disbelief within the sphere of faith, Allah would have only said, "And if they believed", with-out adding "and guarded themselves (against evil)".

The Jews had believed, no doubt; but they did not guard themselves against evil and did not desist from the things forbidden by Allah; therefore, Allah did not attach any importance, any value, to their belief,

and they were called the disbelievers.

**Qur'an: reward from Allah would certainly have been better; had they but known (this):** that is, better than the rewards and profits they seek through sorcery and amass through disbelief.

## Traditions

al Baqir (a.s.) said, *inter alia*, explaining the words of Allah, **And they followed what the satans chanted (of sorcery) against the kingdom of Sulayman...**: “When Sulayman died, Iblis invented sorcery and wrote it in a book; then folding it, wrote on its back: 'This is the valuable treasure of knowledge which Asif ibn Barkhiya produced for the king Sulayman ibn Dawud. Whoever wanted such and such thing, should do so and so.’

Then he buried it under his throne. Thereafter, he unearthed it for the Jews and recited it (before them). The disbelievers said: 'Sulayman had not gained supremacy over us but because of this.' And the believers said:

'Nay! He was a servant of Allah and His prophet.' Thus Allah, Great is His remembrance! said: **And they followed what the satans chanted (of sorcery) against the kingdom of Sulayman.**” (*at-Tafsir*, al-Ayyashi, al-Qummi ).

**The author says:** This tradition says that it was the Satan, that is, Iblis, who invented sorcery and wrote and recited it. There is no discrepancy between this statement and the verse under discussion which ascribes these things to the satans from among the *jinn*.

Even their deeds are ultimately attributed to the Iblis, because he is the source of all evil; it is he who instigates his friends to wickedness and evil. Such usage is common in the traditions.

It appears from this tradition that the verb, “*tatlu*” in this verse is derived from “*at tilawah*” (التَّلَاوَةُ) = to recite, to chant). It not in conflict with the interpretation given by us in the Commentary that it gives the meaning of “lied about” or “faked about”; because, as we said there, this connotation emerges from the preposition, ” *'ala* ” which has changed its semantic value.

The sentence, therefore, may be interpreted as follows: The satans chanted the sorcery, reciting it, and faking it, lying about the kingdom of Sulayman.

Etymologically, *tala*, *yatlu*, *tilawatan* ( تَلَا ، يَتْلُوا ، تِلَاوَةٌ ) returns to *waliya*, *yali*, *wilayatan* ( وِلَايَةٌ ، يَلِي ، وَلِي ) which has the semantic value of being near to, governing and following; one owns a thing gradually, one part following the other – reciting is called *at-tilawah* simply because in recitation one word follows the other.

A fuller discourse of this subject will be given under the verse:

***Verily, your guardian is only Allah and His Apostle and those who believe, those who establish prayer and pay zakat while they bow down*** (5:58).

ar-Rida (a.s.) said, *inter alia*, in his discussion with al-Ma'mun: "And as for Harut and Marut, they were two angels; they taught sorcery to the people in order that they could protect themselves from the enchantments of the sorcerers, and could nullify their devices. And they did not teach any one any (enchantment) until they had said to him:

***'Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever.'***

But a group became disbelievers by practising what they were warned against; and they caused a separation between a man and his wife with their practice (of sorcery). Allah has said: *and they cannot hurt with it any one except with Allah's permission.*" (*'Uyunu l-akhbar*).

## **On Some Spurious Traditions**

Ibn Jarir has narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that he said: "When-ever Sulayman wanted to enter the toilet or to attend to some of his affairs, he gave his ring to al-Jaradah, his wife. When Allah decided to test Sulayman in the way He tested him, one day Sulayman gave his ring (as usual) to al-Jaradah. Then Satan came to her in the likeness of Sulayman and said:

'Give me my ring.' So he took it and put it on. As soon as he did so, the satans (from the *jinn* and the human beings) came under his control. Then came Sulayman and said to her: 'Give me my ring.' She said: 'You are a liar; you are not Sulayman.' So Sulayman knew that it was a trial to test him.

The satans got a free hand, and wrote, in those very days, some books containing enchantments and disbelief, and buried them under the chair of Sulayman. Thereafter they unearthed them and recited them before the people.

And they said: 'It was because of these books that Sulayman dominated over the people.' Thus the people avoided Sulayman and accused him of disbelief. (It continued) until Allah sent Muhammad (S) and revealed to him: ***and Sulayman was not an unbeliever, but the satans disbelieved.***" (*ad-Durru 'l-manthur*)

The author says: This story is found in other traditions too. It is a long story forming a part of a multitude purporting to show the supposed sins and mistakes of the prophets.

Said ibn Jarir and al-Khatib (in his *at-Tarikh*) have quoted Nafi' as saying: "I went on a journey with Ibn 'Umar. When the night was coming to its end, he said: 'O Nafi'! Look at the red star<sup>1</sup>, has it risen?' Twice or thrice I said: 'No.' Then I said: 'It has risen.' He said: 'No welcome to it!' I said: 'Praise the Lord! (It is but) a star, subjugated, obedient (and) submissive!'



He said: 'I have not told you except that which I heard the Apostle of Allah (S) saying. He said: "The angels (once) said: 'O Lord! How doest Thou bear with the mistakes and sins of the children of Adam?' (Allah) said:

'I have put them to trial and given them some dispensation.' They said: 'If we were in their place, we would not have disobeyed Thee.' He said: 'Then select (for trial) two angels from among yourselves.'

They spared no effort in the selection and (finally) selected Harut and Marut. They came down (to the earth); and Allah created in them the lust." (At this juncture, Nafi' said: 'And what is lust?' He said: 'Sexual urge.') "Then there came a woman, az-Zuhrah (i.e., Venus) by name, and both felt attracted towards her, each concealing his feeling from his companion.

Then one of them asked the other: 'Do you feel in your heart what I do in mine?' The other said: 'Yes!' Thereupon, they asked her for themselves. She said: 'I will not give you power (over myself) until you teach me the name by which you ascend to, and descend from, the heaven.' They refused to do so. Then they asked her again; and again she refused. At last they did (teach her the name).

When she flew (to the heaven), Allah effaced her into a star and cut her wings. Then the (two angels) sought pardon from Allah; and He gave them an option, saying: 'If it is your wish, I shall let you return to the position you held before, and then you shall be punished on the Day of Resurrection.

Or, if you wish, I shall chastise you in this world, and when the Day of Resurrection comes you shall be reinstated to your previously held position.' So one of them said to the other: 'The punishment of this world will come to an end and will be short-lived.'

Therefore, they opted for this world's chastisement against the punishment of the next world. And Allah revealed to them to go to Babylon. They went there and the earth swallowed them up; they are hanging upside-down between the heaven and the earth, undergoing punishment up to the Day of Resurrection." ' " (*ad-Durru 'l-manthur*)

The author says: Something like this has been narrated in some Shi'ah books too from al-Baqir (a.s.). as-Suyuti, the Sunni traditionalist, has narrated more than twenty traditions of the same theme about Harut, Marut and the Venus; some of those traditions have been confirmed as having "correct" chains of narrators; and the chains end on various companions, like Ibn 'Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, 'Ali, Abud-Darda', 'Umar, 'A'ishah and Ibn 'Umar.

These are fictitious stories, which collectively ascribe to the angels of Allah the worst type of polytheism and the most heinous sins, that is, idol-worship, murder, fornication and liquor-drinking. Could the angels indulge in such sins, when they are known to be the honoured servants of Allah who are purified from all sins and mistakes?

And they accuse the planet Venus to be a woman of loose character, who was transformed into a

luminary body – have you ever heard of such a punishment!! – while it is known to be a heavenly body, free from any defect in its creation or any flaw in its system; a planet by which Allah swears in the Qur'an:

***But nay! I swear by the stars that run their course*** (and) ***hide themselves...*** (81:15–16).

Moreover, the astronomy has today unveiled its reality, and found out in detail the elements it is made of, as well as their quantity and combination – in short all matters related to it.

This story, like that given earlier (about Sulayman and his ring), is in complete agreement with the legends popular among the Jews. They remind one of the Greek mythology related to the stars and the planets.

A discerning reader will agree that these traditions, like those slandering and defaming the prophets and apostles, are but a few samples of the intrigues and machinations of the Jews.

Their prevalence in the Muslims' books of traditions is a living proof of the hold they held on the Muslims' minds in the early days of Islam. The Jews toyed with the Muslim traditions in any way they liked; and the Muslim traditionalists were their willing partners in these interpolations.

But Allah has kept His Book under His Own protection. The enemies of truth cannot play with it. Whenever one of their satans tries to steal a hearing he is chased away by a visible flame. Allah has said:

***Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most certainly be its guardian*** (15:9);

***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);

***And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and mercy to the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the unjust*** (17:82).

The promise given in these verses is unconditional. Every interpolation, every alteration is repulsed by the Qur'an. The Book of Allah unmasks the true face of the interpolators, adding to their perdition. Also, the Apostle of Allah (S) has said:

“Whatever is in conformity with the Book of Allah, take it; and whatever is against it, leave it.” The *ummah* has been given this frame of reference; it is this yardstick with which all the traditions attributed to the Prophet and his *Ahlu 'l-bayt* are to be measured.

The Qur'an removes every falsehood and exposes every deception. Allah says:

***Nay! We cast the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! it vanishes*** (21:18);

***and Allah desired to manifest the truth of what was true by His words... that He may manifest the truth of what was true and show the falsehood of what was false, even though the guilty ones disliked*** (8:7–8).

Allah confirms the truth and erases the falsehood by showing the true faces of both.

Some people, and especially those with materialistic out–look, who are overawed by the western civilization, have used the above–mentioned historical fact as a pretext to throw away all the traditions attributed to the Prophet.

They looked at some traditionalists and al–Haruriyyah and found that they accepted every tradition – without any scrutiny whatsoever. They reacted to it by going to the other extreme and rejecting every tradition – without any scrutiny whatsoever.

It needs not much intelligence to realize that the total acceptance of the traditions is as bad as its total rejection.

Its unconditional acceptance nullifies the standard laid down for the purpose of differentiating between the truth and the falsehood; and encourages one to ascribe lies to the Prophet. Likewise, its indiscriminate rejection casts aside the said standard and leads one to the rejection of the Book of Allah itself – the Mighty Book that falsehood does not come to it from before it nor from behind it.

Allah has said in this Book: ***and whatever the Apostle gives you, take it; and from whatever he forbids you, keep back*** (59:7);

***And We did not send any apostle but that he should be obeyed by Allah's permission*** (4:64).

If the sayings of the Prophet had no authority, or if his words – reported to his contemporaries who were absent from his gathering or to the generations coming after his time – had no validity then nothing of the religion could survive at all.

Man by his instinct relies and accepts the reports brought by others – he cannot survive without it. As for the alterations and interpolations, it is not a disease peculiar to the traditions of the Prophet.

The society depends on the reported news and information; and the motives to tell lies, to make changes and alterations to suit one's purpose, to twist the words and to quote them out of context, are much more stronger in the case of the worldly affairs.

So, what do we do? Do we reject all reports and information? No! We scrutinize every report with the help of some well–established and relevant standard; what passes the test, is accepted as truth; and that which fails is thrown aside as falsehood; and if no clear result emerges from the test, if we are unable to decide whether the report was true or not, we reserve our judgment – as our nature tells us to do in such cases.

The above procedure is applied regarding the subjects we have some expertise about. As for a subject outside our specialty, the common practice is to refer it to the specialists in that field and accept their judgment.

This is, in short, the dictate of human nature for the smooth running of the society. The self same system is adhered to in religion for distinguishing truth from falsehood. The litmus–paper of this test is the Book of Allah – if a tradition conforms to it, its truth is confirmed; if it clearly goes against it, its false–hood is known; and if no definite stand may be taken because of some ambiguities, then the judgment is reserved.

This system has been explained in the *mutawatir* traditions of the Prophet and the Imams (of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt – a.s.*). It applies to all the traditions that are not concerned with jurisprudence; as for those dealing with the law and jurisprudence, they are governed by the Principles of Jurisprudence.

## **A Philosophical Discourse on Sorcery and Witchcraft**

It is a common knowledge that many unusual events do take place which are outside the frame of the established natural system. It is difficult to find someone who has not seen, or heard about, some abnormal or seemingly supernatural events.

But we find after scrutiny that most of them are not enigmatic and mysterious at all; rather they arise from normal and natural causes. Often they result from practice and training, for example, eating poison, lifting heavy load, walking or dancing on tight–rope etc.

Some are based on natural causes that are not known to the general public, for example, a man walks into flaming fire without coming to any harm, (he applies some chemicals like talc to his body); or sends a sheet of blank paper and the addressee understands the message it contains.

(He writes with an invisible ink which becomes visible if heated by fire or treated with some chemicals.)

A third set depends on the sleight of hand like jugglery. All these seemingly abnormal feats actually emanate from the normal causes, although the causes remain hidden from a common man's eyes; they may even be beyond his ability.

Yet there are other strange happenings that cannot be attributed to any normal physical cause. For example, giving information of the unseen, and particularly foretelling the future events; the charms for love and hate, the spells harmfully or beneficially affecting man's virility; hypnotism; mesmerism; spiritualism; telekinesis and so on.

It is known that such events do take place from time to time; we have seen some demonstrations ourselves; and similar reports were brought to us by reliable sources. Today there are many people in India, Iran and the western countries, who demonstrate such extraordinary feats – and their authenticity is beyond doubt.

It appears from close investigation of their methods and regimen that these feats spring from the will-power of the doer, and from his unshakable confidence in effectiveness of his work. The will-power emanates from the confidence, which in its turn arises from the knowledge.

Sometimes the will acts independently and sometimes it needs some help: for example, writing a certain charm with a certain ink in a certain place at a certain time (for the amulets of love or hate); or fixing a mirror before a certain child (in the seances of spiritualism); or chanting a certain incantation a certain number of times, and so on and so forth. When the conditions are fulfilled the will is strengthened to bring the desired effect into being.

When the knowledge becomes one with the knower, it influences his senses to such an extent that he sees the end product, that is, the desired effect, with his eyes. You may verify this statement yourself. Just tell yourself that a certain person is present before you and that you are looking at him; then put your imagination to work to bring his form before your eyes; this should be raised to such a high level of certainty that you become oblivious of all contrary thoughts and ideas.

And then you will actually see him standing before you – as you had imagined. Many is a doctor who, acting on this principle, restored to health his incurable patients – simply by creating in them the confidence that they would soon get their health back.

Taking this principle a step further, if someone's will-power is extraordinarily strong, it might create an impression on other's psyche too – as it had created on his own self in the foregoing example. That impression might, or might not, depend on fulfillment of some conditions, as indicated earlier.

From the above discourse, we may deduce the following three principles:

**First:** The appearance of such extraordinary events depends on the firm “knowledge” and strong conviction of the doer. But it is irrelevant whether that “knowledge” is true to the fact or not. That explains why the conjurations of the priests of the sun-god and the moon-goddess etc. seemed to work – although they believed that the heavenly bodies had souls, which they claimed to bring under their control by their magic.

Probably the same applies to the angels and satans whose names are “discovered” and invoked by many practitioners of the magic art. The same is true for spiritualism and its séance and spirit communication – and the spiritualists' belief that the spirits attend their sittings.

Utmost that may be claimed regarding those sessions, is that the spirit appears in their imagination or, let us say, before their senses – and this “perception” emanates from their firm belief in their art. But it can never be said that the spirit actually presents itself at those sittings – otherwise all the participants in the sitting should have perceived its presence, because everyone of them has the same senses as the medium has.

By accepting this principle, we may solve many problems related to the séance and spirit

communication. For example:

1 – Sometimes the spirit of a living man is called to present itself at a séance, and supposedly it comes there. But at that very moment, that man is busy attending to his affairs, and he never feels his spirit leaving him even for an instant. The question is: As a man has only one spirit, how was it possible that his spirit presented itself to that séance without his being aware of it?

2 – The spirit is an immaterial essence which has no relation whatsoever with space and time. How can it present itself at a certain place at a certain time?

3 – Why is it that often a single spirit appears before different mediums in different forms?

4 – Why is it that sometimes when the spirits are called to a séance, they tell lies and give wrong answers? And why do the various spirits sometimes contradict each other?

All these problems will be solved if the principle is accepted that it is not any spirit that presents itself to the séance; it is only the firm belief and conviction of the spiritualist and his medium that is at work, making the medium see, hear and feel the spirit. It is all a play of his imagination and will; and nothing more.

Second: Some of the people, holding the strong and effective will–power, rely on their own power and their own being, in bringing about the desired effect, the intended super–natural events. Such events are bound to be limited in strength, confined in their scope – in their own imagination as well as in reality.

On the other side, there are some persons, like the prophets and the friends of Allah who, in spite of their most effective will–power, totally rely on their Lord. They truly worship Him and have full trust in Him.

They do not wish any thing but from their Lord, and by His permission. Theirs is a pure and clear will, untainted by any personal feeling of their own. It does not depend except on Allah. This is a Divine Will – not limited in any way, nor restricted in any manner.

The super–natural events that are brought into being by the first group may be of many kinds: If they are based on enquiry of, or help from, *a jinn* or a spirit etc., then it is called “*al-kihanah*” (أَلْكِيَانَةُ) = divination, sooth–saying, fortune–telling); and if it comes about by means of a charm, amulet, telestom or other such instruments or portions, then it is called magic.

The super–natural events shown by the prophets and friends of Allah are also of many kinds: If it is produced as a challenge, in order to prove the truth of the claim of prophethood, then it is called miracle; and if it is not offered as a challenge, then it is named “*al-karamah*” (أَلْكَرَامَةُ) which literally means nobility, mark of honour; and in Islamic terminology is used for a miraculous event shown without a challenge; and if it happens as a result of the prayer to Allah, then it is called, “answer to the prayer.”

Third: As the whole thing depends on the will–power of the doer, its strength varies according to the strength (or weakness) of the will. That is why some of them may nullify the others, as, for example, the miracle annihilates the sorcery.

Also, a weak agent fails to impose his will on a stronger psyche, as is often seen at the sessions of mesmerism, hypnotism and seances.

We shall further explain this subject somewhere else.

## **An Academic Description of Various Kinds of Magic**

There are many fields of study dealing with various awe–striking feats and extraordinary deeds; and it is very difficult to classify them so as not to leave any thing out. However, we give here a list of the more commonly used branches of this art:

**as–Simiya**<sup>1</sup>: It deals with the ways of combining the will–power with particular physical and material forces for manipulating the natural order and, thus, producing extraordinary effects. Under this head comes the manipulation of thought, also known as the eye–enchantment.

It is the most deserving candidate for the title of magic.

**al–Limiya**<sup>1</sup>: It teaches how one may establish a connection between his psyche and the higher and stronger spirits, in order that one may bring them under one's control, for example, the spirits of the stars, or the *jinn*, etc. It is also called the knowledge of subjugation of the spirits.

**al–Himiya**<sup>1</sup>: It explains how the powers of the higher spiritual world may be combined with the base elements of this world to produce awe–inspiring effects. It is also called talisman. The stars and their configuration have some relation to the material happenings of this world, in the same way as the elements and compounds and their physical qualities affect those phenomena.

Supposedly if the heavenly forms, pertaining to a certain event, for example, A's life or B's death, could be combined with the relevant material forms, the desired effect would take place without fail.

**ar–Rimiya**<sup>1</sup>: It trains one how to control and manipulate the qualities of various things, to produce seemingly super–natural effects. It is also called “*ash–Sha'badhah*” ( اَلشَّعْبَدَةُ ) = sleight of hand, jugglery, magic).

These four fields of knowledge, together with the fifth, called “*al–Kimiya*” ( اَلْكَيمِيَاءُ ) = alchemy, the forerunner of chemistry, primarily the attempt to transmute base metals into gold or silver) formed what the ancients called the five secrets, mysterious branches of knowledge.

Ash–Shaykh al–Baha'i has said: “The best book written on these subjects was the one I saw in Harat, '*Kulah–e sar*' (the head's cap) by name. Its name was an acronym, made of the first letters of the five

subjects, that is, *al-Kimiya'*, *al Limiya'*, *al-Himiya'*, *as-Simiya'* and *ar-Rimiya'*".

The- standard books of these subjects are the epitome of the books of Minds, *Rasa'il*, al-Khusraw Shahi, *adh-Dhakhirah*, al-Iskandariyyah, *as-Sirru 'l-maktum* (by ar-Razi), *at-Taskhirat* (by as-Sakkaki) and *A'malu 'l-kawakib as-Sab'ah* (by al-Hakim Tamtam al-Hindi).

Supplementary to the above are the following subjects:

The knowledge of numbers (numerology): It shows the relation of numbers and letters with the desired effect. The relevant letters or numbers are filled in a magic square or triangle etc. in a particular sequence.

al-Khafiyyah: ( **الْخَافِيَّةُ** ) = the hidden knowledge): It breaks down the name of the desired effect or other relevant names, and finds out the names of the angels or the satans managing the said effect; and then composes the invocations made of those names.

The books written by ash-Shaykh Abul-'Abbas al-Buni and as-Sayyid Husayn al-Akhlati are the standard works of the above two subjects.

Then there are various modern arts covering this field, which have gained wide currency nowadays; for example, mesmerism, hypnotism and spirit communication. As described earlier, these are based on the impression created on the imagination by the will-power. There are numerous well-known books and magazines dealing with these subjects.

We have given all this detail here, so that it may be ascertained which of them could be classified as magic or sorcery

---

1. The red star refers to the Mars, but as will be seen later, Ibn 'Umar is supposed to talk about the Venus. Obviously, the man who forged this "tradition" did not know the difference between the Mars and the Venus. (tr.)

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-mizan-exegesis-quran-vol-2-allamah-tabatabai/suratul-baqarah-verses-102-103>