

## What is meant by the “White Hand of Musa (A)?

وَأَدْخِلْ يَدَكَ فِي جَيْبِكَ تَخْرُجَ بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ فِي تِسْعِ آيَاتٍ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ  
وَقَوْمِهِ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ

***And enter your hand into the opening of your bosom (collar), it shall come forth white without evil; among nine signs to Fir'awn and his people, surely they are a transgressing people. (al-Naml, 27/12)***

Amongst all the Prophets of God, Musa (A) was the one who displayed the most miracles, perhaps because the Banu Israil – the Jews – were the most perverse amongst the nations in their outlook and conduct. One can say that from the aspect of their intransigence and stubborn habit of clinging to their own ideas, they are a unique nation in history.

Due to their warped logic, they were never truly receptive to the truth, and repeatedly demanded that their Prophets display miracles according to their individual proclivities, their idle curiosity and their baseless whims; some of them even demanded miracles that were logically impossible. They did not understand that the path of seeking conviction, searching for the truth and acquiring guidance – which is the only course for salvation – requires the heart and mind to be free of the tendency towards stubbornness. Additionally, miracles only come about through God's will and according to the necessity and circumstances at the time, and not for the amusement and vagaries of an ignorant people.

To complete His favour, God sent most of His Messengers to this nation, and they presented many wondrous and clear miracles to their people so that the face of Truth would not be covered by the veils of deception and corruption. However, the Jews were ungrateful for these blessings, and killed several of the Prophets of God. Despite their atrocious behaviour, God patiently presented His proofs by continually sending Prophets to them.

The greatest Prophet appointed as a messenger to this nation, was Musa (A); he was sent to a nation

who, under the yoke of slavery, had lost all its virtues and excellences. In their practice, lies masqueraded as the truth, and merits were based on false criteria. Musa (A) began his mission by preaching to a limited and closed circle in an environment which was bereft of Divine values and knowledge, until he made the nascent community stronger and increased their inner realization. Like the Prophets before him, he tried to bring an end to their narrow and ossified thinking by inculcating in them the preference for the life in the next world.

The verse above mentions only one of the wondrous miracles of this Godly man and contains several novel and elegant points, the exposition of which follows below:

According to the scholars who have commented on this verse, the phrase, “white without evil” refers to the whiteness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A), which he presented to the people as a proof of his claim of prophethood. The use of the phrase, “without evil”, negates the notion that his hand was stricken or afflicted by any disease. In fact, the Qur’an asserts that this whiteness was distinct from a kind of known illness.

This explanation is weak in several respects:

1. The whiteness of the hand of this Prophet of God must have resembled the whiteness of a kind of sickness (vitiligo or leukoderma) for the verse to allay the concerns of the observers and reassure them that there was no affliction present.
2. At the time of Prophet Musa (A) magicians performed wondrous acts, and even though the deeds of the magicians and charlatans were the result of their limited human abilities and were based only on sleight-of-hand, training and practice, they nevertheless had a great effect on the minds of the common people. However, a miracle of this type (a white hand) was not of the same level as the other miracles displayed by Musa (A), each of which was amazing and unique in its own right. Furthermore, the miracle of the white hand (as currently described) would not convince the masses that an extra-ordinary act was taking place, or weaken the position of the magicians and convince them to come out to the arena of confrontation.
3. This miracle was only visible to the group who had gathered around Prophet Musa (A) and it was difficult for those who were even a few metres away from him to see it clearly.

To support our claim that the arguments above are weak, we can refer to another verse:

فَأَلْقَى عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ {0} وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ بَيْضَاءُ لِلنَّاظِرِينَ

***So he cast down his rod, and lo! it was an obvious serpent; And he drew forth his hand, and lo! it appeared white to the onlookers. (al-Shu'ara, 26/31-32)***

The verse above describes how Prophet Musa (A) first cast down his staff in front of a large crowd of Fir'awn's people and others that had been assembled to watch him. The staff turned into a large dragon and caused consternation in the assembly; it was then that that he displayed his second miracle, which was his radiant hand.

If we assume that that the hand of the Prophet (A) became white only to the extent that it resembled someone with a skin-related illness, it would not be visible except to a small group of the crowd who had gathered, and would not have qualified as a miracle that heralded his Divinely-appointed mission and that served as the main proof of his claim. It would not be enough to bring about popular acceptance in his Prophethood or cause the wonderment that would bring about a deep and positive transformation in the hearts and minds of the people and broaden the horizons of their thinking.

About the specific time when the miracle took place, the Qur'an states:

قَالَ مَوْعِدُكُمْ يَوْمَ الزَّيْنَةِ وَأَنْ يُحْشَرَ النَّاسُ ضُحًى

***(Musa) said: Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon. (Ta Ha, 20/59)***

It is possible that Prophet Musa (A) chose this special time for the display of his miracle because by then the sun was at its highest point and the day was at its brightest so that nobody would be able to deny the occurrence and nature of the miracle and everyone would see it clearly.

How can we imagine that at this time of the day in the bright sunlight, his miracle merely resembled the hand of a sick person, so that people confused the whiteness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A) for leprosy, while God informed them that what they were witnessing was the miracle of their Prophet and not a type of affliction of the skin!

With this interpretation we cannot expect that this display of the whiteness of his hand, which is devoid of any brilliance or radiance, to transform the audience or be effective in convincing them to abandon their erroneous beliefs and submit to the claims of the Messenger of God. This is because a miracle demonstrates its relation to the Creator and the Knower of revelation, and its nature is such that it cannot be challenged by people who are unaware of the supernatural world and those who witness it feel that have been allowed a new chance to discover the truth.

On the other hand, the Qur'an states:

وَمَا نُرِيهِمْ مِنْ آيَةٍ إِلَّا هِيَ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أُخْتِهَا وَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْعَذَابِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

***And We did not show them a sign but it was greater than it's like, and We overtook them with chastisement that they may turn. (al-Zukhruf, 43/48)***

In this verse it has been specified that each miracle that Prophet Musa (A) displayed was followed by a bigger and more important miracle. This demonstrates a subtle and important point which is a methodology to encourage informed choice and for the staged development of man to a level where his thinking changes. This is because if, some of those whose thinking was perverted were not convinced by the first miracle, the second miracle might be more compelling and inspire them and bring life to their dead hearts and encourage them to search for the truth.

Thus on the day of their festival, and in the midst of the multitudes loyal to Fir'awn, when the Prophet of God cast his staff on the ground and demonstrated that awesome miracle which caused astonishment and consternation to all, if we imagine that the second miracle – the white hand – only resembled the whiteness of the hand of a person with some sickness, how can we say it was greater and more important than the first miracle? When such whiteness is not only less remarkable than the first miracle, but is not even equivalent or comparable to it.

By taking into account the arguments above, it seems that the interpretation of the white hand resembling that of a sick person is not plausible and we need to re-examine the matter to remove the difficulties mentioned above.

This Divine miracle can be explained in the following manner:

Since the term used for whiteness (*bayda*) is also a synonym for the sun, the nature of this miracle is according to one of three possibilities: either the level of radiance and brightness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A) was of a lower intensity than the radiance of the sun, which would not be noticeable by the people; or it is equal in intensity to that of the sun, which likewise would not cause that much amazement; therefore, the only remaining possibility is that the brightness of the Prophet's hand must have been more intense than the sun so that its penetrating illumination would cause wonderment in every observer. In this way it would send a message to those who sought the path of true guidance to consider this miracle as a conclusive proof of prophethood which originates from a Divine source, and ultimately force the people of Fir'awn to grudgingly submit to the truth.

According to medical science, a radiance and brilliance more intense than that of the sun cannot be tolerated by human eyes, and if the intensity is greater than the capacity of the eyes to bear, it will be damaging to every eye directed at it. A further danger also exists in that it may damage the retinas just as when one stares overlong at the sun; therefore, it seems that the Qur'an is indicating that the miracle here is that the light radiating from the hand of Musa (A), although brighter than the light of the sun, is perfectly harmless to the gaze and does not damage the vision of the onlookers in any way.

Now it becomes clear that that this new interpretation of the phrase, "white without evil", can reinforce the view that the radiant light that issued from the hand of the Prophet of God, and which lit up the

surroundings, did not cause any damage to the onlookers.

By keeping in mind the preceding discussion, the meaning of the word “*bayda*” also becomes clear; here it does not denote normal whiteness; rather the meaning of brilliance and illumination is more compatible with the verse. 1 This meaning for *bayda* is also normally found in the terminology of jurisprudence (*fiqh*); for example, in the expression, “the brilliant nights” (*ayam al-bayd*), which are the nights during which the moon is at its most luminous. These examples can be of use in revealing the facts and provide another proof for the matter discussed above.

From the foregoing, the verse can be translated as follows:

“O Musa, put your hand into your collar and when you draw it out, it shall be radiant without causing any damage; this is one of nine miracles with which you have been sent to Fir‘awn and his people, indeed, they are a transgressing and rebellious nation.” (al-Naml, 27/12)

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1. The late Mulla Muhsin Fayd in his exegesis of the verse states: “He would take his hand out of his collar and illuminate his surroundings.” (Tafsir Safi, 4/89). Therefore, at those moments of the day, the brilliance of the white hand of Prophet Musa (A) would be brighter than the sun, otherwise the statement that his hand illuminated his surroundings in the day time would not make any sense.

Allama Majlisi states in his exegesis of this verse: “The radiance that issued from the hand of Prophet Musa (A) was brighter than that of the sun.” (Bihar al-Anwar, 13/78).

Abu’l Futuh Razi also states in his exegesis of the verse that: “He would draw his hand out from his collar and it would appear white and it would be brighter than the sun.” (Tafsir Razi, 7/353).

The author of Nasikh al-Tawarikh also states: “He would draw his hand out of the opening at his collar and it would be as bright as the sun and it would light up the scene in a manner that nobody could look directly at it.” (Nasikh al-Tawarikh, 1/373).

All these statements show that the explanation that the whiteness of the hand of the Messenger of God was similar to the whiteness of a skin affliction – which the great exegetes have generally inferred from the phrase, “white without evil” – does not agree with any of the reports mentioned above.

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