

A Bounty in the Hearts of Mountains

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيْضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ

Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours; and in the mountains are streaks 1, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black? (al-Fatir, 35/27)

In the Qur'an, the descriptions of the wondrous macrocosm designed by the Creator have been mainly divided into two. The first is the explanation of the intricate system of creation and the existence of awe-inspiring phenomena, the endless marvels of which man witnesses throughout the vast expanse of nature.

For those whose personal beliefs are underpinned by a Divine worldview and who regard the universe as having been originated by the intelligent design and perfect wisdom of a Creator, every moment provides an opportunity to contemplate over an aspect of existence, and gather important lessons from its structure and organization. In this manner, they clearly perceive the glory and radiance and the wise hand that has elegantly penned the pages of existence.

The second is the account of the dazzling realities that lie beyond the natural world, which are remote from the complex mechanism of the material realm and possess expansive horizons which are not subject to the conventional principles and laws that we are used to. As a result, our perception and understanding of the mysteries of the latent aspects of existence is naturally limited and in fact, the knowledge of mankind is like an insignificant drop in front of a vast ocean when it comes to the unknown and secret elements of the non-material world.

Qur'anic exegetes have commented on this second type of wonder at some length, although in truth, no amount of deliberation about these mysteries – even if one manages to pierce the veils that shroud them

– can illuminate more than a small portion of the happenings in the world beyond. This is because, as indicated earlier, the entire realm of existence is far more vast and expansive than this natural world, and within it, the non material world is far richer and more extensive than the material world and due to their intrinsic limitations, the scientific tools at the disposal of mankind are not powerful enough to study and analyze most of these matters.

However, even in the particular case of the phenomena perceived in the natural world, we can conduct our research and attempt to determine the facts in two ways; one is to interpret the Qur’anic verses in the light of modern knowledge and to analyze the various natural orders (animals, vegetation, inanimate matter, etc.) and compare scientific findings with the Qur’anic accounts to conclusively demonstrate that there is no discordance or contradiction in the two, and that reason and intellect also confirm the word of God.

We should bear in mind that although scientific knowledge provides the illumination that has solved some mysteries, it is not capable of dispelling all the secrets in creation. (Of course, one should not compare the knowledge derived from the Qur’an with scientific hypotheses, because science is based on experiments and research, and theorems based on experimentation are shaky and unreliable, and throughout its history scientific principles have been subjected to amendments and then the old notions filed away. In fact the Qur’an, which has an eternal hue, and is remote from every uncertainty, should be the first point of reference, against which the validity of scientific discoveries should be judged.)

Secondly, in relation to these wonders of the natural world and when studying the various creations that make up existence, we must also keep in mind the prevailing circumstances at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an, and the capacity of the audience in those days. We need to consider the level of ability, technology and understanding of the people who lived in that era, and who did not generally possess the means to investigate some of the more obscure unexplored and unknown matters of creation. And through this we come to realize the extent of the miracle of the noble Prophet (S).

And in fact, about the verse under consideration, the major focus of our research is of the second type, as we will now explain:

Mines containing multihued precious gemstones are substantial sources of income for the countries that possess these valuable treasures. These stones of various colours are stored in the depths of mountains in particular locations around the world and are extracted by a variety of tools and skilful processes. Thereafter, they are exported all over the world bringing much wealth and importance to the countries which produce them.

Although mines containing precious gemstones are found and excavated in most countries, however the number of rich mines in countries such as Iran, Italy, China, South Korea, India and Portugal are more abundant than in other locations. The primary colours of the stones are white, black and red, while other colours can be considered as secondary.

In the verse under consideration, the Qur'an describes the primary colours of the stones found in mines all over the world, as well as mentioning the secondary colours:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيْضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ

Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours; and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black? (al-Fatir, 35/27)

If the facts contained in the verse above have not come from the Creator of the mines – the Almighty Creator who has created every atom in the universe and who possesses comprehensive and direct knowledge of every part of existence – where else could it have come from?

The noble Prophet (S) passed his blessed life in the cities of Makka and Madina, and only undertook two short journeys away from the Arab peninsula; once in his childhood when he accompanied his uncle who had taken a caravan to Syria, and another time in his twenties, when he conducted business as an agent of Khadija, once again to Syria.

As for the various mines that contain precious stones of various hues, which nowadays are considered as part of the national treasures of countries and which provide benefit to nations, they are only found in a handful of other countries, and not in Syria. Furthermore, they are found deep in the bowels of mountains, so how could the Prophet (S) have known of their existence and nature from any other source of information?

Would it be possible for an ordinary person, who did not possess insight or any spiritual connection with the source of all existence and who could not display any miracle and who had no access to revelation, to possess such knowledge in those days? And was the fact that he did possess this knowledge not a proof that he was connected to the Originator of creation and received revelation from Him? In fact, in those days people did not generally spend much time in contemplating about the mysteries of nature or trying to uncover the innumerable secrets of the various materials and creatures in the world.

In those days which human being possessed this solid and well-rounded knowledge where he was not only aware of the existence of these mines, but also spoke of future generations who would extract precious stones (which have been enumerated alongside the rainwater as one the bounties of God) from these mines which were hidden deep in the depths of mountains?

Aside from the eloquent nature of the verse above, which might have an outward similarity with other literary works, it possesses a unique distinctiveness and undeniable majesty that makes it transcend the

reach of human endeavour. The verse mentions two bounties and their intimate connection with the life of man; one is the bounty of vegetation and the other is the bounty of inorganic materials.

Vegetation in the form of colourful fruits and some grains which have been mentioned at the beginning of the verse ensures man's nutritional needs and strengthens his body, while the second bounty, that of mountain ranges, provide the raw materials from which man can build a shelter for himself. In truth, the Qur'an mentions these two bounties and draws the attention of man to these two sources of his most basic and fundamental needs, food and shelter.

The wise Creator created the surface rocks for man to use while he had not yet advanced past the scientifically stagnant period of history, while He had kept more variegated gemstones for human beings to use when their civilizations flourished and their knowledge developed so they may harness these better materials to construct modern types of buildings. We know that in ancient times, people did not have access to (many) multicoloured stones to use in their constructions.

In those days, most of the rocks that were used by the people were of the poor variety commonly found in all mountain ranges across the world, which were easily accessible to all. They would use these rocks to lay down the foundations of their houses, or occasionally to line the roofs of their buildings. It is in more recent times that man has acquired the skills and developed the equipment and modern machinery to successfully extract precious stones from the deep recesses of mountains and put them to use in various constructions.

In the next verse, God states:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ
الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

And of men and beasts and cattle are diverse colours, likewise; only those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah; indeed Allah is Mighty, Forgiving. (al-Fatir, 35/28)

Apart from the colours of objects and the stones inside mountains, in this verse God mentions the diverse colours found amongst human beings, who are fair and dark-skinned; and about animals also, there is a mention of the expansive palette of colours that they exhibit.

As we have seen, the Qur'an clearly alludes to the wide variety of colours found throughout the mineral, plant, animal and human kingdoms and opens a door of enquiry so that everyone can look into nature and its processes and marvel at the intricate system that is behind even the minutest particles in the vast fabric of existence.

The Qur'an declares that these wonders of creation, each of which is a sign of the endless knowledge

and grandeur and power of God Almighty, can only be truly appreciated by those who possess intellect – those whose minds are illuminated by the light of insight, wisdom and mature vision – who realize that the grand construction and system of the universe with all its splendour is but an insignificant manifestation of His power and capability. They consider the entirety of the pages of the book of creation to be a testimony to the influence of the design and supreme intellect that is behind its creation.

Indeed! Those who possess insight and intellect, when they witness the wondrous design and aim and programming and far-reaching wisdom that is evident in the world around them and in the celestial bodies and in the heart of atoms and stones and in every aspect of the universe, from the smallest to the biggest object, they are irresistibly drawn to the limitless perfection of the Creator and they constantly hasten towards Him with eagerness, fervour and perfect faith.

The explanation and exegesis of this verse demonstrates another example of the miracle of God's speech, which has not been considered by the great exegetes in their works.

1. According to the author of the lexicon, "Mu'jam al-Wasit", the word "al-jadad" refers to a portion of an object whose colour is different from the surrounding, and this meaning is more consistent with our discussion. Mu'jam al-Wasit, 1/110.

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