

Resurrection from the Sleep of Death

خَشَعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ

Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts. (al-Qamar, 54/7)

Metaphors and similes are effective rhetorical devices used in literature to eloquently convey the intended meaning. Three aspects make up every simile: the first entity, the second entity (which is being compared to the first) and the similitude between the two. However, the important point in order to appreciate the eloquence of the speaker or the skill employed in constructing the imagery contained in the phrase is to understand the similitude correctly, because the reason for using the simile to convey the intended meaning is embedded in the type of similitude that has been used.

Especially in the case of Divine revelation and the Qur'anic verses, which are precise and full of meaning, it is important to ponder more carefully about the various aspects of similarity between the two objects which are being used in a simile, in order to uncover even more of the fascinating secrets contained in God's words and to enable man to imbibe from the limitless oceans of God's knowledge to the extent of his own capacity.

In their exegesis of this verse, the eminent commentators of the Qur'an have explained that the basis of the similitude is the swarming of mankind out their graves and scattering out into the plains of the place of gathering (*mahshar*), because of the momentous advent of the day of Judgement. That explosive event will be heralded by the destruction of the universe and the abrupt collapse of the cosmic order and the emergence of mankind from their graves. It will be such a terrifying and dreadful event that men will scatter in confusion and disperse aimlessly just like locusts when they swarm out of their larvae. They will begin to move, but not consciously towards any destination.

The commentators have correctly explained the usage of this simile based on the description (*muntashir*) which comes at the end of the verse, and have painted a picture of the extraordinary state of confusion

and terror that will prevail upon mankind on that day, when every order that is familiar to them will have been transformed; nevertheless, it would be better not to confine the discussion to just this one aspect of the similitude, but to explore the meaning of its other aspects also. This would allow us to better understand the object of the verse, which is to describe the astonishing scenes of the great day of judgement.

There is no doubt that one day the present order in the cosmos will undergo a tumultuous upheaval, and following a cataclysmic event, it will be brought to an abrupt end. Not only shall the earth be subjected to convulsion and turmoil, but the stars will also die and the galaxies will break up and fall silent; in other words, that universal explosion will devastate the heavens and the earth simultaneously, and the prevailing system and order in creation will be completely transformed, bringing an end to the life of the universe and its inhabitants and the annals of created beings.

Indeed, this total annihilation of the cosmos, in which no single creation will be identifiable, is the inevitable future of our world. Then, graves will be upturned, and the earth, in obedience to the directive of its Lord, shall reveal the age-old contents and secrets that she had hidden in her bosom, and lighten her burden.

If man looks at the constitution of his own body, which is made up of various elements found in the earth and water, he will realize that this body will one day be absorbed into the earth and provide sustenance for fruits and plants and thus be dissipated all over the world; or his molecules might be ultimately shaped into drops of water that find place in the vast oceans.

The elements that make up our bodies are the result of changes that have occurred under a special set of causes and conditions; not only does the body of every human being reach its form through the same procedure, but when it decomposes and decays into atoms at the end of its life, it once more becomes sustenance available to other life forms. And in this way the constituent elements of one body are preserved, even while transmuted, in the world. Therefore the idea of a renewal of life after death is not difficult for man to picture.

Why should it not be possible to rejoin these scattered substances, which have been dispersed to every remote corner, by gathering them all from the embrace of the earth and the clutches of the winds, and bring them together in a new form and shape? In fact, at the beginning of its creation, the same thing had occurred, and in the same manner.

This was a glance at one aspect of the astonishing and abiding greatness of God regarding the arrival of the day of judgement.

However, it seems that what is more important and arresting in the simile used in the verse above describing the dispersal and thronging of mankind on the day of gathering (*mashhar*), is their emergence from their graves which resembles the swarming of locusts out of the ground.

The beginning of the verse alludes to this also. Human beings lie in the earth after death for an interval, waiting for the command of God to bring the dead back to life and to emerge from the graves.

This will occur after the second blowing of the trumpet and the piercing shout, which will envelop the entirety of creation and immediately bring humanity back to life and out of their graves. Similarly, locust larvae lie dormant and buried in the earth just like the dead. The pregnant locusts insert their bodies into the ground and lay their eggs deep in the earth and then secrete a liquid over the eggs to cover them. This liquid protects them from the elements and in fact, forms a temporary tomb for them.

The larva capsule of the locust remains inert in the ground just like a dead corpse in the tomb that has been prepared for it to be buried in; although it possesses a very thin and delicate wall, the wall is sufficient to protect the larva for the necessary time. In fact, it is just like the shroud (*kafan*) that has been wrapped around the body of a dead person.

During the autumn and winter months, the larvae remain motionless and then, when spring comes, they open up to release the locust within. The insects are now ready to bring to an end their waiting (*barzakh*) and to leave their tombs. After emerging out of the ground, according to certain factors and circumstances, they take to flight.

Indeed, the situation with dead humans is the very same. The various parts of the human body that have decomposed into the earth are changed like everything else, according to the laws of nature. By the will of God, they will become enlivened at the advent of the day of judgement, and just like the newly hatched locusts, they shall emerge from their graves and hurry to the appointed meeting place of *mahshar*. They would display their original features which were shrouded and hidden; once more the human being would have his essential being restored in a new form.

The simile employed by the Qur'an is possibly the most accurate and subtle similitude in this regard, and can be readily understood and perceived by every individual. The verse clearly portrays the state of man when he is restored to life.

God informs his servants and advises them to observe the newly-hatched locusts as they emerge from their tombs in the earth, and then bring to mind the beginning of their own new lives when they will also come out of the earth. In this manner they will be convinced that this event will certainly come to pass and that their own fate will unfold in the same manner and that that day is waiting for him.

Man's constitution can accept various changes but he will not accept that the kernel of his being should become non-existent. Through this example, he will see that just like other bodies, the characteristics of his constitution are lost but nothing is lessened from his essence. In fact, his essence and ego remain conscious and indestructible throughout all his evolution, until the day of his final reckoning arrives.

According to the views stated above and through the use of such an elegant simile, one can translate the verse under study as follows: "They go forth from the graves like locusts and are scattered on the

plains of the gathering-place (*mahshar*).”, contrary to the usual translations which state, “They go forth from their graves, and like locusts are scattered on the plains of the gathering-place (*mahshar*).” 1

1. In the science of rhetoric (*‘ilm al-ma’ani*), there is a discussion about negation (*salb*) and affirmation (*ijab*) in a sentence; if the similitude in a simile is positive (affirmative simile), then it applies to both the adjective and the noun of the simile. Now in the verse under discussion, the word *jirad* (locusts) has been described by the adjective *munshar* (scattered), therefore the similitude which is the “emergence from graves” applies to both *munshar* as well as *jirad*.

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