

Doctrines in the Perspective of Shi'ah and Ahl al-Sunnah

My belief that the Imāmiyyah Shi'ah being the delivered sect, is even more strengthened by the fact that their beliefs are tolerant and flexible, that is, easily admitted by any wise sane man of sound adroitness. With them we can find for every question and creed, a satisfactory and sufficient solution given by any one of Ahl al-Bayt Imams (‘a) that can never be found with Ahl al-Sunnah or other sects.

In this chapter, I will follow up with details the most important beliefs of the two sects, trying to point out those ones which I have admitted, giving the reader the freedom of thought, choice, criticism and sarcasm.

I draw the attention to the fact that the original and genuine creed for all Muslims being only one, which is having faith in Allah— the Exalted — and His Angels and Scriptures and Messengers, without making any difference between His Messengers. All the Muslims also agree on the fact that Hell-fire is true, and Paradise is true, and that Allah will verily resurrect all the dead from graves, gathering them for the Day of Reckoning.

They concur too regarding the Qur’ān, believing that their Prophet being Muhammad the Messenger of Allah, and that their qiblah (direction for prayer) being one. But the difference lies in the conception of these doctrines and beliefs, which turned to be a stage for the theological schools, exposing on it miscellaneous opinions and madhāhib (religious doctrines)

Believing in Allah the Exalted by Both Sects

The most important point that can be referred to in this respect, is sighting Allah — the Exalted — which Ahl al-Sunnah have established in the Hereafter for all the believers. When going through the Sihḥ of Ahl al-Sunnah, like those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim for instance, we shall find narrations proving the sighting really not figuratively. ¹

Rather they contain even anthropomorphism to Allah — the Glorified — and that He laughs,² comes and walks and descends to this world (dunyā),³ or even that He uncovers His leg that has a distinguishing sign.⁴ Moreover, they say that He (Subhānuhu) places His foot in hell, whereat it will be filled saying: at all, at all; beside other things and descriptions from which Allah — the Glorified and the Mighty — is free and far.⁵

One day I have passed by the City of Laamo in Kenya, at East Africa, finding a Wahhabi Shaykh giving a sermon in the mosque. He was telling the worshippers that Allah has two hands, two legs, two eyes and a face. When I disapproved this from him, he began to confirm his argument by citing some Qur'ānic verses, saying:

“The Jews say: Allah’s hand is fettered. Their hands are fettered and they are accursed for saying so. Nay, but both His hands are spread out wide in bounty.” (5:64)

He also said:

“Build the ship under Our eyes...” (11:37)

He further said:

“Everyone that is thereon will pass away; There remaineth but the Countenance of thy Lord...” (55:26,27).

I said: O brother, all these verses you cited and other ones, are all but metaphors and not real meanings!

He replied by saying: All the Qur'ān is real and has no metaphor at all. Thereat I said: How do you interpret then the verse:

“Who so is blind here will be blind in the Hereafter...” (17,72),

Do you conceive it with the real meaning? Is every blind in the world will be blind in the Hereafter? The Shaykh replied: We are talking about Allah’s hand and eye and face, and have nothing to do with the blind!

I said: Forget about the blind. How do you interpret the verse I mentioned: “Everyone that is thereon will pass away; there remaineth but the Countenance of thy Lord...?” He turned his face to the attendants saying to them:

Is there anyone among you who couldn’t understand this verse? ...It is as clear and explicit as the Almighty’s saying:

“Everything will perish save His Countenance...” (28:88)

I said to him: You have added fuel to the fire! My brother, we have disputed regarding the Qur'ān... you claimed that the Qur'ān has no figurative speech, and all is but reality! While I claimed that there is

figurative speech in the Qurʾān, especially the verses having materialization or anthropomorphism. If you insist on your opinion, you have to say that the meaning of “Everything will perish save His Countenance” is that his two hands and legs, and all of His body will perish, and nothing will remain of Him but the face, above which Allah is highly elevated, and too far! I then turned my face toward those present in the meeting saying: Do you approve of such an interpretation? All of them kept silent, and even their shaykh could never say one word. So I bade them farewell, invoking Allah to guide and help them to know the truth.

This is the way they believe in Allah, as recorded in their Sihḥ and their sermons. I hold that some of our scholars deny this, but the majority of them believe in sighting Allah— the Glorified — in the Hereafter, and that they will see Him in the same way as seeing the moon at the night of full moon, with no cloud covering it, citing as a proof the verses:

“That day will faces be resplendent. Looking toward their Lord.” (75:22,23)⁶

But as soon as you be acquainted with the creed of the Imḥmiyyah Shiah in this respect, your conscience will be at rest and your mind will submit to accept the interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses having incarnation or anthropomorphism to Allah — the Exalted — holding them to indicate figurative meaning and metaphor, not reality or the superficiality of utterances, as imagined by some people.

In this regard al-ʾImḥm ʾAli (ʾa) says: “...Whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate, and the divings of understanding cannot reach; He for Whose description no limit has been laid down, no eulogy exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed...”⁷

In refuting the anthropomorphists, al-ʾImḥm al-Bḥqir (ʾa) says: “Rather, whatever we have distinguished with our imagination, in its minutest meanings, is but a creature that is made like us, returning toward us...”⁸

Further we should be sufficed in this respect with Allah’s reply in His Holy Scripture: “Naught is as His likeness,” and His saying: “Vision comprehendeth Him not”, beside His saying to His messenger and conversationalist Musḥ (ʾa), when he asked to see Him”... He said: My Lord! Show me (Thy self), that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou wilt not see Me,” and this lan (wilt not) in the verse, which is called Zamakhshari lan gives the meaning of taʾbid (neverness), as grammarians observe.

All this being a decisive evidence proving the veracity of the opinions of the Shiʾah, who derive them from the traditions of Ahl. al-Bayt Imams — the source of knowledge and trustees of the Message, and whom Allah made to inherit the knowledge of the Scripture.

Whoever intends to go into details about this research, has to refer to the books elucidating this topic, like Kalimah hawl al-ruʾyah of al— Sayyid Sharaf al-Din, the author of al-Murḥjaʾt.⁹

Belief in Prophethood by the Two Sects

The dispute between the Shi'ah and Ahl al-Sunnah mainly lies in the issue of 'ismah (infallibility). As the Shi'ah believe in the prophets' 'ismah before and after their mission (bi'thah), while Ahl al-Sunnah hold that their infallibility is confined only in Allah's words that they propagate, and other than this they, like all other people, may err and be correct. Their Sih̄h are filled with narrations indicating that the Messenger of Allah(S) has mistaken in several places, and the Companions were correcting him and telling him the right. The examples they cite for this being the issue of the captives of Battle of Badr, in which the Prophet (S) has erred and 'Umar hit the mark, and without him the Messenger of Allah would have perished.¹⁰

In another place, when he entered al-Madinah, he saw its people cutting the date-palms, whereat he said to them: "Don't cut them as they will give dates", but they turned to be shays (unwanted bad dates). Then they came to him complaining about the matter, whereat he said to them: "You are better aware of your world affairs more than me." In another narration he said: "I am just a human being, if I command you to anything related to your religion you take it, and if I order you to do anything according to my opinion, I am but a human being."¹¹

Another time they relate that he was bewitched, remaining so for several days not knowing what to do, to the extent that he was imagining of making sexual intercourse with women and not doing so,¹² or fancying to himself the doing of something and not doing it.¹³

Again they report that he once forgot in his prayer, being uncertain of the number of rak'ahs he performed,¹⁴ and also he once slept so deeply that his snoring could be heard by all, and then he got up and prayed without taking ablution.¹⁵ Once again they narrate that he be angry with, reviles and curses whoever undeserving that, saying "O Allah I am no more than a human being, any of the Muslims I have cursed or reviled, You make this exculpatory and purifying fever for him..."¹⁶

They also report that he once upon a time he was lying in 'A'ishah's house, with his thighs being uncovered, whereat Abu Bakr and then 'Umar entered upon him, conversing with him while he was on this condition... when 'Uthm̄n asked permission to enter, he (S) sat and made up his clothes. When asked by 'A'ishah about the reason, he said to her: "Shouldn't I be ashamed of a man of whom the angels are ashamed."¹⁷

They further claim that he sometimes would enter upon the morning ritually impure in the Month of Ramad̄n,¹⁸ missing the dawn prayer... beside other strange traditions that no reason or religion or conscience is ready to accept or approve of.¹⁹

Whereas the Shi'ah — in accordance with Ahl al-Bayt Imams — exculpate the prophets from such trifles and silly things, in particular our Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace and the best of benediction), holding that he is impeccable and immune against all minor and major sins, wrongs and

insubordinations. They believe in his being infallible (ma‘sum) against error, forgetfulness, absence of mind, sorcery and whatever causing mind to be disordered. And rather he is impeccable against practising any act contradictory to manliness and good morality, like eating on the roads, or giggling loudly, or joking with impropriety, or any reprehensible act disapproved by public norms. It is needless to refer to their claims that he used to place his cheek on his wife’s cheek before people, sharing her in looking at the dancing of the Negroes,20 or to let his wife go out in a battle, competing with her, in a way defeating her one time, and she defeating him the other, telling her then: “This one is versus that one.”21

The Shi‘ah consider all the narrations reported in this respect, which are incongruous with the prophets’ ‘ismah, to be altogether composed and fabricated by the Umayyads and their supporters with these aims: First, for degrading the Messenger of Allah (S). Second, for seeking justification for their abominable deeds and unsightly wrongs recorded in history books. And if — supposedly — the Messenger of Allah (S) errs and be inclined to love and lust, as in the story they narrated of his passionate love for Zaynab bint Jahash, when he saw her combing her hair (while being the wife of Zayd ibn Hārithah), exclaiming: “Glorified is Allah Who changes the hearts.”22 Or the story of his inclination toward ‘A’ishah and his unjust treatment with his other wives, that they have delegated to him Fātimah once and Zaynab bint Jahash another time, asking and pleading him to deal equally between them.23

So if this be the state of the Messenger of Allah (S), no blame then is upon Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abi Sufyān, or Marwan ibn al-Hakam, or ‘Amr ibn al-‘As, or Yazid ibn Mu‘āwiyah, with all the caliphs who have perpetrated all kinds of abominations, and violated the sanctities and slaughtered the innocent.

This being the case, while the Imams from Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), the Imams of the Shi‘ah, believe in his ‘ismah (infallibility), interpreting the Qur’ānic verses which apparently indicate that Allah has admonished His Prophet, like

"He frown and turned away" (80: 1),

or the verses containing confession of the sins like His saying:

"That Allah may forgive thee of thy sin that which is past and that which is to come" (48:2),

or His saying:

"Allah hath turned in mercy to the Prophet" (9: 117),

and also:

"Allah forgive thee (O Muhammad)! Wherefore didnt thou grant them leave." (9:43).

They affirm that all these verses never derogate from this (S) ‘ismah, as some of them were not meant at him in particular, while some others have to be figuratively interpreted not according to the external meanings of the words, the method that is most often used in the Arabic language, and also by Allah—the

Glorified — in the Holy Qurʾān.

Whoever seeking more information and intending to obtain certain knowledge of things, he has just to refer to the Shiʿah exegesis books, like al-Mizān fi tafsir al-Qurʾān of al-ʿAllāmah al-Tabṭabāʾi, and Tafsir al-Kāshif of Muhammad Jawād Maghniyyah, and al-ʾIhtijāj of al-Tabrasi, beside other books. I haven't quoted from these books since I intended brevity and exposing the creed and belief of the two parties in general. And the aim of this is but to reflect my own beliefs in which I have conviction, and myself selecting a school believing in the infallibility of the prophets, and successors after them, to relieve my mind, dissipating my concern, and eradicating my suspicion and perplexity.

To claim that the Prophet's infallibility being confined in propagating Allah's words (Qurʾān), is just baseless nonsense, since no proof is there indicating which part of his speech is Allah's, and which one is his, so as to be maʿsum in the former and not maʿsum with being liable to err in the latter.

I seek protection by God from this contradictory utterance prompting to doubt and vilification in the sanctity of religions. This fact recalls to my mind a conversation held between me — after being guided — and a group of friends, in which I tried my best to convince them that the Messenger of Allah (S) being infallible (maʿsum), while they were attempting to persuade me of his being maʿsum in propagating the Qurʾān alone. Among them there was a professor from Tozad (region of al-Jarid),²⁴ and they were known for wittiness, knowledge and crack jokes. He contemplated for a while and said: “O company I have an opinion regarding this issue,” we all exclaimed: Please give us what you have! He said: —What our brother al-Tijani says, as the Shiʿah hold, is the very truth, and we should believe in the Messenger's absolute ʿismah, otherwise suspicion will find its way into our hearts in the Qurʾān itself! —They asked: What for? He immediately replied: — Have you seen any of the Qurʾānic verses with Allah's signature underneath??

By the signature he meant: The stamping with which the contracts and letters were sealed, denoting the identity of each party to the contract and sender of the letter. All those present laughed at this witty remark, that was in fact of a deep meaning. Every unprejudiced person, contemplating attentively, will be shocked by the fact that: believing in the Qurʾān's being God's words is to believe in the absolute infallibility of its communicator, without partitioning it, since it is infeasible for anyone to claim of hearing Allah speak, and no one can allege that he saw Jabriel when descending with revelation (wahy).

The quintessence of the above-mentioned exposition, is that the Shiah's opinion about ʿismah is an apposite opinion, making hearts feel assured, eliminating all whispers of the self and Satan, and closing all doors before the riotous, particularly enemies of religion from among the Jews, Christians, and infidels looking for gaps to sneak from. Their aim of this, being to overturn our beliefs and religion from the foundation and degrade our Prophet. So they most often dispute against us with what Sahih al-Bukhārī and Sahih Muslim reported of the deeds and sayings ascribed to the Messenger of Allah (S), from which he is far exempted.²⁵

How can we convince them that the books of al-Bukhārī and Muslim contain many lies and forged narrations, which being a dangerous speech of course, as it is never accepted by Ahl al-Sunnah, who consider Sahih al-Bukhārī as the most authentic book after the Book of Allah!

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1. Sahih al-Bukhārī, Vol. II, p. 47, & Vol. V, p. 179 & Vol. VI, p.
 2. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 226 & Vol. V, pp. 47–48; Sahih Muslim, Vol. I, pp. 114–122.
 3. Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 197.
 4. Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 182.
 5. Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 187, and on page 202 he confirms Allah’s having a hand and fingers.
 6. Verse 23 of Surat al-Qiyāmah was interpreted by Ahl al-Bayt Imams (peace be upon them), that the faces at that Day (Doomsday) be resplendent (nadirah), to mean prettiness and splendour (bahjah), while looking at their Lord’s mercy.
 7. Nahj al-balaghah, exposition (sharh) of Muhammad `Abduh, Vol. I, Khutbah No. 1.
 8. ‘Aqīd al-‘Imāmiyyah.
 9. Al-Muraja‘at is one of the books that should be read by whoever desiring to be acquainted with the Imāmi Shi‘ah’s beliefs and thoughts.
 10. Al-Bid‘yah wa al-nihāyah, of Ibn Kathir, who reported from al-‘Imām Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhi.
 11. Sahih Muslim, “kitāb al-fadā’il”, Vol. VII, p. 95; Musnad al-‘Imām Ahmad, Vol. I, p. 162 and Vol. III, p. 152.
 12. Sahih al-Bukhārī, Vol. VII, p. 29.
 13. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 68.
 14. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 123 and Vol. II, p. 65.
 15. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 37, 44, 171.
 16. Sunan al-Dārimi, “kitāb al-riq‘q”.
 17. Sahih Muslim, “bāb fadā’il ‘Uthmān”, Vol. VII, p. 117.
 18. Sahih al-Bukhārī, Vol. II, pp. 232, 234.
 19. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 114 and Vol. VII, p. 96.
 20. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 228, and Vol. II, p. 3, “kitāb al-‘idayn”.
 21. Musnad al-‘Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Vol. VI, p. 75.
 22. Tafsir al-Jalālayn, about interpretation of God’s words: “... And thou didst hide in thy self that which Allah was to bring to light.” (33:37).
 23. Sahih Muslim, Vol. VII, p. 136, “bāb fadā’il ‘A’ishah”.
 24. Region of al-Jarid is located south of Tunisia, with 92 kms from Qafsa, the birthplace of Abu al-Qāsim al-Shābi, the renowned poet, and al-Khidr Husayn, who was the head of al-‘Azhar, beside many Tunisian ‘ulamā’ who were born in this region.
 25. In his Sahih, Vol. III, p. 152, bāb shahādāt al-‘a‘mā from “kitāb al-shahādāt”, al-Bukhārī is reported to have said: Ibn `Ubayd ibn Maymun narrated to us, saying, we are told by `Isa ... from ‘A’ishah who said: The Prophet (upon whom be God’s peace and benediction) heard a (blind) man reciting the Qur’ān in a mosque. Thereat he (S) said: “May Allah have mercy upon him, he reminded me of so and so verses I dropped from so and so surah ...” — How is it wonderful, dear reader, such a messenger who forgets the verses (āyāt), and had not this blind man been there to remind him of them, they would have been buried in oblivion — I seek Allah’s forgiveness of this hallucination.

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