

Section 11

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 102-103

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ
كَفَرُوا يَعْلَمُونَ 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 هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ
وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَقٍ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا
بِهِ أَنفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

102. *"And they followed what the Shaitans chanted of sorcery in the reign of Solomon; and Solomon disbelieved not, but the Shaitans disbelieved by teaching people sorcery; and that which was sent down to the two angels, Harut and Marut, in Babylon. Even though they (the two) never taught anyone without saying: 'We are only a trial for you, therefore do not disbelieve'. So they learned from these two (magic spells) by which they might cause separation between a man and his wife, though they cannot hurt anyone (thereby) but by Allah's leave. They learn what harms them and profits them not; and they surely knew that the buyers of it would have no share of happiness in the Hereafter. And vile was the price for which they sold their own selves, had they but known (this)!"*

103. *"Yet, had they believed (in Allah) and guarded themselves (against evil) a reward from Allah*

would have been better, had they but known (this)!"

Solomon (as) and the Sorcerers in Babylon

It is understood from the Islamic literature that, at the time of Solomon (as), some of his fellow countrymen used to practice the art of sorcery. Solomon (as) ordered that their records and related materials be gathered and kept locked in a safe place.

(Their preservation was, perhaps, for the purpose that there may have been some pieces of paper among them helpful for breaking the spells of the sorcerers' magic.)

After the departure of Solomon (as), a group of people took them out and began spreading and teaching others sorcery.

Some, taking advantage of this opportunity, said that Solomon (as) was not a prophet at all, and the wonderful power that he had over the realms of nature was through witchcraft; so it was with the help of those magic tricks that he could dominate his country and do extraordinary things.

By following this group, some of the Israelites were severely engaged in the art of sorcery; so intensively that they put the Turah aside.

When the Prophet of Islam (S) announced his invitation and, through the verses of the Qur'an, proclaimed that Solomon (as) had been one of the apostles of *Allah*, some of the Jewish rabbis told their people: 'Are you not surprised that Muhammad says Solomon was an apostle while he was a sorcerer?'

This statement by those Jews was counted a great accusation against this Divine prophet (S), because when they said he was a sorcerer it insinuated that he was a liar and not a true prophet. This action caused him to be considered a blasphemer. Then, the above verse responded to their false accusation.

However, the first verse of this group of verses illustrates another dimension of the heinous actions of the Jews: that they accused the apostle of *Allah*, Solomon (as), of sorcery and witchcraft. It says:

"And they followed what the Shaitans chanted of sorcery in the reign of Solomon..."

The pronoun 'they', existing in the Arabic word /wattaba'u /, 'they followed', may refer to the Jews contemporary with the Prophet of Islam (S) or those contemporary with Solomon (as) or all of them.

The objective meaning of the term / sayatin / may be the evil people, or devils of the Jinn, or both of them.

Then, after stating the above idea, the Qur'an adds:

"...and Solomon disbelieved not..."

Solomon (as) never did practice sorcery, and he did not take any advantage from it in attaining his goals:

"...but the Shaitans disbelieved by teaching people sorcery..."

"...and that which was sent down to the two angels, Harut and Marut, in Babylon...."

Yes, they stretched their hands toward sorcery from two sides: one, from the side of sorcery which was taught by the Shaitans during the time of Solomon (as); and the other side was the instructions that Harut and Marut taught people for the purpose of breaking the spells of sorcery.

"...Even though they (the two) never taught anyone without saying: 'We are only a trial for you, therefore do not disbelieve !...'"

In short, when these two angels appeared in the society, sorcery was in fashion among those people and a popular item in their marketplace. At that time, most of the people were captured in the grips of sorcerers.

The two angels taught people the ways in which they could counter the effects of such wicked practices (the witchcraft) of the sorcerers as an art of self-defense. But learning this art demanded, firstly, that they learn about the magic itself.

So, in order to be able to negate sorcery, they initially had to learn sorcery itself, and the ways in which it might work effectively, as good skillful magicians.

But Jewish mischief mongers took this matter as a means for spreading sorcery more and more. They expanded it so vastly that they accused the Divine prophet, Solomon (as), of sorcery and said that if nature, or even Jinns and humans, obeyed him (as), it was merely the effect of sorcery.

Yes, this is the common habit of the vicious: to accuse the great men as being their followers to justify their own school of thought.

At any rate, they could not pass this Divine trial successfully and, consequently, failed in keeping the right path, the true Faith.

"...So they learned from these two (magic spells) by which they might cause separation between a man and his wife..."

But the Power of *Allah* is above all these abilities.

"...though they cannot hurt anyone (thereby) but by Allah's leave..."

"...They learn what harms them and profits them not..."

Yes, they altered this divine constructive training. Instead of utilizing it on the path of improving their society and using it as a means of defense against the witchcraft of the sorcerers, they applied it to doing evil.

"...and they surely knew that the buyers of it would have no share of happiness in the Hereafter...."

"...And vile was the price for which they sold their own selves, had they but known (this)!"

They were heedless of their own happiness and of that of the society they belonged to, and were drowned in the whirlpool of blasphemy.

"Yet, had they believed (in Allah) and guarded themselves (against evil)... a reward from Allah would have been better, had they but known (this)!"

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 104-105

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقُولُوا رَاعِنَا وَقُولُوا انظُرْنَا وَاسْمَعُوا وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

مَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِينَ أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مِمَّنْ رَبُّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

104. "O' you who have Faith! Do not say (to the Prophet), 'ra'ina', but say 'unzurna'; and hearken (unto him) and for unbelievers awaits a painful punishment."

105. "Neither those who reject Faith from among the people of the (earlier) Book, nor those who take partners to Allah, wish that any good should be sent down upon you from your Lord, and Allah chooses especially whom He pleases for His Mercy and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace."

Occasion of Revelation

Ibn Abbas, the leading commentator, is narrated to have said that the early Muslims, when the Prophet (S) was speaking and teaching them the divine verses and commandments, often asked him to speak slowly so that they could comprehend the material well and could have opportunity enough to ask their questions.

For this purpose, then, they applied the phrase /ra'ina:/ derived from the root / arra'a:/ 'to give respite', which means: **'give us respite, wait for us.'** 1 But the Jews took the same word from the Arabic root /ar-ra'unah / used with the meaning of **'foolhardiness, thoughtlessness, foolishness'**, which means: **'make foolish of us '** and suggests an insult. 2

Here, the Jews had found something by which they could ridicule and make fun of the Prophet (S) and the Muslims. The first verse of the above verses was revealed to prevent this derisive usage of the word by the Jews. It commanded the believers to use /unzurna / instead of / ra'ina / which had the same meaning, but was plain and unambiguous. Thus, the enemies could not misuse it.

Some other commentators have said that the phrase / ra'ina / was employed by some Jews in whose language it had an uncomplimentary meaning. They repeated it again and again.

Some others of the commentators have also said that the Jews pronounced / ra'ina / instead of saying / ra'ina / and, addressing the Prophet (S) with that term which meant '**our cattle-tender, shepherd**', ridiculed him.

These occasions of revelation do not contrast with each other, so that all of them may be right.

Leave No Pretext for Enemies!

Regarding what was said about the occasion of revelation, the first verse of the verses under discussion says:

***"O' you who have Faith! Do not say (to the Prophet) 'ra'ina' but say, unzurna...."
"...and hearken (unto him), and for unbelievers awaits a painful punishment."***

It is well understood from this verse that the Muslims, should be careful to avoid giving their enemies any pretext, because they may misuse even one short sentence against them. The Qur'an advises the Muslims to avoid uttering even the smallest common word, which they might transform into a term of reproach in order to weaken the spirits of the Muslims.

They should be careful not to select words which have multiple or ambiguous meanings that may be misused by the enemies to mock them thereby but rather should choose appropriate, unambiguous words. They must guard themselves against the cynical trick of using words which sound complimentary to the ear but have a hidden barb in them.

When Islam is so meticulous that it does not let Muslims give their enemies pretext for these little things, the duty of Muslims is clear for greater and more important subjects, both concerning their interior affairs and international matters.

It is also noteworthy that the phrase / ra'ina /, besides what was stated before, is not free from impoliteness in meaning, because this term may also be derived from the word /mura'at /, which mean that '**you should observe us and we will observe you likewise**'. Then, the Qur'an has bidden the Muslims not to use it anymore, since it contains a sense of impoliteness, besides the abusing of it by the Jews.

A Precise Meaning

The honorific and enlivening sentence /ya 'ayyuhallaḡina 'amanu /, O' you who have Faith', addressed to the believers, has occurred 80 times in the Qur'an. The above verse is the first one which contains this phrase.

It is interesting that this phrase has occurred only in the verses that have been revealed in Medina, viz. it is not seen in the Meccan verses. It may be for the reason that with the emigration of the Prophet (S) to Medina, Muslims gathered together and it was then that the situation of Muslims became stabilized, especially when they formed a strong, powerful government. Hence, *Allah* (s.w.t.) addressed them with this phrase:

"O' you who have Faith!"

This phrase conveys another meaning, too. It indicates that now that you have Faith and have submitted to the truth, i.e. you have taken a covenant with *Allah*; you should obey Him according to the commandments that have come along with it. In other words, your Faith necessitates that you follow these instructions accordingly.

It is also notable that in many references of Islamic literature, including the ones of the Sunnite, the holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said: *"No verse has Allah revealed with O' you who have Faith' save that Ali is at its top and is its chief."*³

In the next verse, the Qur'an pulls back the curtain on the enmity and grudge of the pagans and the People of the Book towards the believers. It says:

"Neither those who reject Faith from among the people of the (earlier) Book, nor those who take partners to Allah, with that any good should be sent down upon you from your Lord..."

But this is not but a bare wish for them, because:

"...and Allah chooses especially whom He pleases for His Mercy...",
".. and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace,"

Because of their envy and enmity, the enemies of Islam did not want to be witnesses to this honour and glory given to Muslims, and they could not adapt to the fact that a great Prophet with a Divine Book from *Allah* could be appointed for them (Muslims), But, it was impossible for those hostile enemies to hinder the Mercy and Grace of *Allah*.

1. Aa-Durr-ul-Manthur, vol. 1, pp. 252-253

2. Jami'-ul-Bayan, by Muhammad-ibn-Jarir Tabari; vol. 1, pp. 469-473

3. Tafsir-i-Furat-ul-kufi; p. 49, Tradition 7; & Tarikh-i-Damishq, Ibn 'Asakir, vol. 2, p. 428

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