

Man between Angels and Satan

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Introduction

Since the time of his birth, man lives between two different forces. One force is that of angels and the other is that of Satan. Angels guide man to goodness and Satan misleads man, taking him towards wrongdoing.

God has created two faculties in every human being: ego and conscience. In the Quran ego is called *nafs ammara* (12:53) and conscience is called *nafs lawwama* (75:2). Ego is the entry point for Satan and conscience is the entry point for angels. Those situations in which man gets provoked and yearns for revenge, wanting to teach the other person a lesson, are the instances when man opens the door to Satan, allowing him to influence his thinking process. On the other hand, if he develops modesty, tolerance, well-wishing, and avoidance in the face of adverse circumstances, he opens the entry gate for angels. For example, in India we often hear of incidents where a Hindu procession reached a mosque and was denied a passage past it. If Muslims prevent them from going past the mosque because of concerns of disrespect (*behurmati*), then they are influenced by Satan. On the other hand if they allow, it means that they have been influenced by the angels. These are two forces between which man has to spend his life.

Role of Angels and Satan

There is a stark difference between the role of Angels and Satan. While Satan's role is offensive, the role of angels is supportive. If any provocative situation arises, Satan jumps to instigate man. However, the angels come to man's support only when he prays. In other words, during provocative times, if one prays for God's help, then God sends angels to support him. For example, in the case described above where a procession is required to go past a mosque, Satan would jump to provoke the Muslims. However, the angels won't come by themselves. Angels would come only in case, the Muslims after getting the information of the procession, go inside the mosque and pray to God. Angels would then come and help placate the situation and develop feelings of forgiveness and well-wishing.

Satan fosters negative thinking, while angels foster positive thinking. Satan has been granted reprieve from the time of Adam till the striking of the Day of Judgement. The Satan said:

I shall make the path of error seem alluring to them on the earth and will mislead them all.

(15:39)

At the time of creation

At the time God created man, two other creatures existed: *angels* and *jinn*. God asked jinn and angels to bow before Adam. Here, “bowing” did not mean that angels and jinns should worship man. It meant that they should give man a “free hand,” and not create any obstacles in his life on earth. This arrangement was because according to the Creation Plan of God, man had to settle on Earth and spend a part of his life there. During this period, God intended that man be given complete freedom and he be allowed to do whatever he wished. Doing so was the foremost requirement of putting man to test so that he could be held accountable for using or misusing his freedom. The angels agreed to not place any hurdle in his path, but Iblis, the head of jinn, did not agree to bow before Adam. He made it an ego problem because he thought man had been made superior to him.

Satan replied, ‘I am better than him.’ (38:76)

Angels did not make it an ego problem and accepted what God asked of them. Satan however, vowed to make man follow his pattern. He challenged God that he would lead man astray.

I will lead all of them astray. (38:82)

The challenge of Satan meant that he would make all people traverse his path: *of making every issue an ego problem*. The present world is a world of challenges, therefore, all the time it happens that one gains superiority over the other because in such a competitive scenario, overcoming one another is bound to happen. Hence there will be people who would apparently receive more than others. This is where Satan comes into the picture. Satan incites those who are not able to gain superiority or experience a difference in what has fallen to their lot, to think that they have lagged behind, while others have taken a lead. Such incitement leads to enviousness and animosity.

The correct interpretation of this phenomenon is that differences will invariably arise in the world because it is a world full of competition and challenge. Differences therefore, arise everywhere: family, national and international life. Since Satan wants man to follow him and so he provokes man to react during such situations. As a result, man makes the presence of differences, a matter of his ego and jumps to confront others. This is very serious issue because it will determine man’s success in the life hereafter. According to a verse in the Quran, God said to Satan:

I will fill up Hell with you and every one of them who follows you. (38:85)

Philosophisation of God's message

I will explain this with an example. The religion of Zoroastrianism arose in six century, B.C. According to its philosophy, there are two forces in nature: *good* and *evil*. They believe that the present world is a perpetual battleground between the good and evil forces where the two shall continue to battle each other till, in the end, the forces of good triumph. Thinking about this conception made me realise that there was a major thing which was amiss the Zoroastrian belief: it was *man* himself. It rendered man as a passive observer and victim of the outcome of this battle. According to Islam, on the other hand, God created man for being tested and Angels and Satan only perform the role of respectively guiding and misguiding him. Man therefore has a central role because his choice to use or misuse his freedom, will determine his fate in the life hereafter.

According to the Quran, God sent Prophets to guide man in all ages and times. The question is what then happened to the teachings of these prophets? There exist about a dozen major religions in the world. However, the teachings of these religions are a distorted version of the truth that came through the prophets. In other words, the teachings of these religions are a philosophized version of the original religion which was revealed to the prophets. Let me explain why.

The printing press came only after the 15th century but all these religions are much older in their inception. Before the printing press, the dissemination of information happened through the oral tradition and memory was the only source of preservation of information. When God sent the prophets, they brought with them His message but this message was later distorted due to human interpolations. The Quranic word for this phenomenon is *muzahat* (9:30), which means imitation.

Philosophisation of the original message of God

I read an article by a Muslim scholar who said that Muslims take pride in the fact that the Quran revealed to the Prophet Muhammad is preserved even today unlike all other religious books. It is critical to understand that Quran being the preserved Word of God is *not* a matter of pride; it is matter of fact or truth (*haqiqat*). In other religions, *muzahat* took place, that is, people of that time added their own thought to the text of the scripture, thus creating a self-styled version (*khud-sakhta* version) of the revealed religion. This was how the philosophy of the age in which these religions were revealed crept into their basic ideological framework. Therefore, every religion, except Islam, became a philosophized version of the original religion.

Zoroastrianism serves as an example of this phenomenon. In Zoroastrianism, the concept of Angels and Satan got distorted to become the concept of a perpetual battleground of good and evil forces.

Likewise, monism (or *advaitvaad*) is a philosophized version of truth. Man was taught that he would come closer to God through *dua* and worship. This “nearness” was not in the physical sense, but in the psychological sense (*nafsiyati qurbat*), which was to be developed through feelings (*ahsas*). But, gradually the concept that God is a separate entity from His creation (monotheism) was converted into monism, which propagated that God and His creations are not separate entities. In other words, in later periods, monotheistic concept of God was philosophized and man and God were made one (monistic concept). The extremist proponents of monism went to the extent of claiming that there was no difference between ‘god’ and ‘dog.’ *Tawheed* therefore, was philosophized and converted to monism or *wahdat-e-wujud*.

Another example of philosophization of the original teaching of religion is the philosophisation of the concept of hereafter into reincarnation (*punar janam*). According to the teaching imparted by the prophets, man was created as an eternal being. A short part of his life is spent in the present ephemeral world. After his death, he is shifted to the eternal world where he is either rewarded with paradise or punished with Hell basis the deeds he accomplished in the life before death. But in later times, this concept of the life hereafter was philosophized into the cycle of birth and rebirth.

The above applies to all teachings of religion. The notion of Trinity in Christianity (*three in one and one in three*), for example, was also a product of this distortion. Trinity implied the union of three divinities: the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Spirit*, in one God. The concept of Trinity originated in Greece and influenced the Christian religion to the extent that Trinity became a philosophized version of Christ’s teachings. Christ’s teachings were the same as that of other prophets and like it happened with all other prophets, the original teachings of Christ were also distorted with the passage of time.

Finally, God sent the last Prophet and provided him with a strong team, through which the Quran was preserved along with *Sunnat* (life of Prophet) and *Hadith*. So, Islam became the custodian of the preserved version of the divine truth in the form of the Islamic teachings, while other religions remained the custodians of the philosophized versions of the divine truth. This is a critical issue which man must contemplate and deliberate with all seriousness upon because if he does not understand the difference, he would easily go astray.

Muzahat (changes that crept into religion)

After a long time, I understood the meaning of *muzahat*, which is what led to distortion of the original religion. My analysis made me understand that in previous ages, philosophy was considered to be the supreme academic discipline and philosophers were held in highest regard. Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc. were revered. Thus in this period, whatever existed of the prophets' teachings was mixed with philosophical ideas. This led to philosophisation of teachings of religion. It was the era post-Newton that led to the downfall of philosophy. Pre-Newton, the philosophical ideas held sway everywhere. The teachings of the prophets were present only in the memory of people. Since printing press was not available in those days, the teachings of the prophets could not be preserved. That which was in people's memories was distorted on account of being mixed with philosophical concepts.

The Quran however, was preserved during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and after the coming of the printing press it was preserved beyond any distortion. All historians agree that the Quran is the preserved version of the truth that was brought by Prophet Muhammad. In the earlier times, the teachings of prophets were moulded into philosophical ideas. But with the preservation of the Quran, God brought man out of this speculation and darkness. God preserved His message so that man could draw lessons from it:

This is a blessed Book which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to ponder over its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed. (38:29)

Quran is for contemplation

The month of Ramadan is the month of contemplation over the teachings of the Quran

The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind (2:185)

One must read the Quran to understand its deeper meaning. This must be done round the year, however, in the month of Ramadan, it must especially be undertaken. Ramadan was the month in which the revelation of the Quran began in 610 A.D. Thus, God ordained Ramzaan as the month in which a believer must pay special attention to contemplation of the Quran (*khususiat se*) so as to better understand the message of God. It must be remembered that the Quran is not a manual. A manual lists facts (in terms of figures) and requires no thinking as such. The figures can simply be read once and understood.

Contemplation on the other hand, seeks to discover profound truths. For example, if we reflect on the way our hands and feet are made, we would realize how beneficial it is to have longer fingers and smaller toes. Had the size been the opposite, life would have been very difficult. Small fingers would have made the hands clumsy and long toes would have made the feet unsteady. This realisation makes us thank God for having given us the finest form, and we understand the following verse of the Quran:

He formed you and gave you the best of forms. (64:3)

Therefore, one is to know the facts and figures and the other is to know the reality or truth that lies behind these figures (*ginti ke peeche ki haqiqat*).

The *Tarawih* prayers read during the month of Ramadan are not meant for merely *finishing* the recital of the Quran, rather to think on the verses in the Quran. A person once came to Hazarat Ayisha and informed her about certain people who had finished reading the entire Quran. She said for them:

They read it, but they did not read it. (Musnad Ahmed)

She said so because those who had completed the Quran had done so without contemplating on its verses. The recital of the Quran is not a matter of *fazilat*, that is, it's incorrect to believe that if we in some way or the other read the entire Quran during this month, we'll be abundantly rewarded. The reward can be had in terms of increasing oneself in intellectual development, and this happens only when one reads the Quran with the objective to grasp its deeper meaning. It is fallacious to think that because this month is very blessed, recitation of the Quran will become the source of us being mysteriously rewarded. Such thinking is based on culture. The right approach to reading the Quran therefore, is to contemplate on its verses (*tadabbur*).

Quran and Ramzaan: historical relationship

The Quran has a historical relationship with the month of Ramadan. The revelation of the Quran began in the month of Ramzaan. Due to this historical relation, it was bidden that the Quran be read during this month, so that people can develop greater understanding of its message. I'll give an example to illustrate how to contemplate over the verse of the Quran. The very first verse of the Quran is *Bismillahir rahman irrahem*, that is,

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful (1:1)

People generally say ‘*Bismillah*’ before eating or drinking, wearing clothes, entering inside the car, etc. But, this is not the meaning of ‘*Bismillah*’. If we think deeply about this verse, we’ll be able to understand something very great. According to a Hadith, the Prophet of Islam has said:

Say ‘bismillah’ whenever you initiate a new task (Mishkat)

At the time of beginning of a new work, if we say, ‘*Bismillah*,’ we activate our mind to understand that the present world has been made by a Creator who is merciful and compassionate. This thought develops hope within us. It makes us realize that we are entering such a world about which we can be assured in advance that its Creator, God, will be merciful towards us. Thus, in the above verse of the Quran, we have been given the line of thought with which we should embark on a new journey. When we initiate a task, we feel confident and are filled with hope as the Creator has said that He is merciful and compassionate towards us.

In the Quran we have been also given the following injunction:

Man shall have only that for which he strives (53:39)

Here we are told that we don’t have to leap into the unknown. We have to think and plan our actions accordingly. This world is a matter of 50-50: fifty percent has to be given by man and the rest will be taken charge of by God. Hence, before taking any action, we should judge our decision and use our wisdom. If we act foolishly, we’ll fail instead of achieving success. The first verse of the Quran develops conviction in us, and at the same time, the Quran exhorts us to use our reason and follow the law of nature. If we act against the laws of nature, we are bound to meet failure.

Once a man came to the Prophet and asked whether he should tie his camel and put his trust God, or whether he should leave it untied and put his trust in God. The Prophet replied:

Tie your camel and then put your trust in God (Tirmidhi)

So, in this world it is not right to take “any” action and expect God to bestow His blessing on us. We have to first use the wisdom and carefully examine whether what we are doing is in accordance with the law of nature or not. In any situation, action has to be taken by properly analyzing its various aspects, holding consultations with people, and not getting provoked.

Conclusion

The Quran has been sent as a guidance for man to lead his life on Earth:

It is guidance and good news for the believers (27:2)

God sent His guidance to man from the very beginning, but it couldn't remain preserved because of lack of press and absence of a strong team. In every age, soon after its revelation, people altered the message of God by incorporating in it concepts and ideas which held sway at that time. This was philosophization of the original teachings of religion.

God therefore took it up to preserve the Quran and this task was accomplished through the final Prophet and his team of Companions. To say that the Quran is 'our pride' is to say the right thing in a wrong way. We have to say that it is a historical fact that the Quran is a preserved book. It preserved not so that it be wrapped in a cover and kept at a pedestal. It is rather for people to think over it again and again.

I'll give an example of the change that contemplation brings about in thinking of a believer. These days, Muslims live in complaints. The Quran says:

We have created man into a life of toil and trial (90:4)

On reading this verse, one will realize that hardship is a part of nature, then why should one protest against it? One has to inevitably live in hardship, thus, one should know the art of *hardship management*. Muslims complain because they do not read the Quran to understand its message, they merely recite it. This is not the purpose of the Quran. In the entire month of Ramazan, one is required to reflect on the verses of the Quran, and not merely finish its recital. In the last ten days of *etikaf* (seclusion for the purpose of praying to God), one must dedicate oneself entirely for the contemplation of the Quran.

I often question those who have read the Quran about what its gist and central theme is. But nobody is able to tell anything. I myself have been thinking about the Quran's central theme and have also been doing *dua*. I have discovered that the goal of the Quran is to make people aware about the Creation plan of God - why God created us and settled us here? This discovery was an outcome of intense study. Let me explain how.

I have studied the Quran many times and once while I was reading, I reached this verse:

**He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct
(67:2)**

It was then that I discovered that the purpose of the Quran is to make man aware of the Creation Plan of God so that man lives properly in this world and abandons those ways which are not in accordance with the Divine Plan. So that, when man faces God after his death, God may accept him. I discovered this myself. No one could tell me this gist because they all read the Quran for *gaining reward*. As such, they are not be able to understand its deeper meaning, which requires a lot of thinking and serious deliberation.

In the morning, I received a phone call from Mehboob Bhai, who resides in Mumbai. He told me that today he had taken an appointment with a renowned Bollywood personality so that he could present him with the Quran in-person. When Mehboob Bhai, reached his house at the appointed time in the morning, he saw that a huge crowd had gathered in front of his house. To his shock, he came to know that the Bollywood personality with whom he was scheduled to meet today, passed away hours ago due to a heart attack. When the wife of the deceased actor came to know why Mehboob Bhai was there, she took the Quran from him.

There is a great learning for each one of us in this occurrence. We have to be very cautious, as we don't know when we'll die. When death strikes, our time to contemplate upon the Quran and to give it to others would be over. We must therefore, strive to understand it ourselves and spread the message of God in the very first chance that we have.