

The concept of Truth in the Quran – 2

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 6 August 2021

وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ۗ بَلْ أَتَيْنَهُمْ بِذِكْرِهِمْ فَهُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِهِمْ
مُعْرِضُونَ ۝

“And if the Truth [were to] follow their desires, the heavens and the earth and all those who are in them would perish. Indeed, We have brought them their reminder, but they turn away from their reminder.” — ch. 23, v. 71

By “Truth” here could be meant God, since Truth or *haqq* is a name of Allah, or just simple truth could be meant. We want everything in this world to follow our desires, whether it is the events around us, life, death, weather, etc.; we wish things happened as we want. But God says here that the whole system of the universe would collapse if it ran according to anyone’s desires. That system runs according to certain laws. The weather cannot remain sunny all the time; it must also rain. We cannot remain in a state of pleasure and satisfaction all the time; difficulties must come in our way. There has to be night, it cannot be day all the time, and there has to be death, not only birth or the coming of new life.

Since the beginning of human history, absolute rulers, autocrats and despots have tried to run their countries according to their desires. Not only did they largely fail in their ambitions to make those things happen that they wanted, but even in those matters in which they succeeded in enforcing their desires it brought disaster for them and their country.

As God is truthful and He has laid so much emphasis on it in the Quran, so are human beings required by the Quran to follow the truth and be truthful. Those people are commended and praised who adhere to the truth, even if they belong to other religions. The Quran says about a group of the Israelites, the Bani Isrā’īl:

“And from the people of Moses [i.e. Jews] there is a party who guide with truth, and with it they do justice.” — 7:159

In a short, well-known chapter of the Quran, it says that the passage of time provides testimony that:

“... man is surely in loss, except those who believe and do good, and exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience.” — ch. 103

This tells us that time proves that those who adhere to the truth and truthful ways are successful. They have to be patient and wait for long to see success by adhering to the truth. During that time they must be steadfast on remaining on the right course. You can usually find ways of achieving a quick success and an immediate way out of a difficult situation by resorting to some false means and by knowingly going against true principles. But the passage of time will show that such short-term successes add up to a total failure in the long run.

As prophets of God were models and examples to their followers, they were all truthful to such a high degree that even people who rejected them knew that they were truthful. We all know of various incidents from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad which illustrate that his opponents were convinced that he always told the truth. In the Quran, the description “truthful” is also applied to earlier prophets. In the story of Joseph (Yusuf, *alai-his-salām*), a man went to him from the king to speak to him in the prison where Joseph was confined, to ask him to interpret a dream of the king which no one could understand. That man addressed Joseph as follows: **يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ** — “Joseph, O truthful one” (12:46). The prophets Idrees, Abraham and Ishmael are all called truthful (see 19:56, 19:41 and 19:54). About Mary the mother of Jesus the Quran says: **وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ** — “And his mother was a truthful woman” (5:75).

The Quran clearly states about Abraham: “And mention Abraham in the Book. Surely he was a truthful man, a prophet” (19:54) — **إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا**. Yet according to a hadith in Bukhari, the Holy Prophet said: “Abraham did not tell a lie except on

three occasions” (hadith 3357, 3358, 5084) — لَمْ يَكْذِبْ إِبرَاهِيمُ - عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ - إِلَّا ثَلَاثَ كَذَبَاتٍ. It is also in other books of Hadith such as Sahih Muslim. It is also found in Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Those three occasions are then mentioned in these hadith. Of course, it is stated in the hadith that he lied for a noble purpose, “for the sake of Allah”, and not for any selfish gain. There is an English translation of the Quran, entitled *The Noble Quran*, by Dr Al-Hilali and Dr Muhsin Khan which is published by the authorities in Saudi Arabia and officially-endorsed by their Ministry of Religious Affairs. In this translation they have fully quoted this hadith in a footnote (under 16:121), as if to announce to the world that Abraham lied three times. However, Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his Urdu translation of Bukhari, has commented on this hadith as follows:

“Any hadith which contradicts the Quran cannot be accepted. The Quran calls Abraham as ‘a truthful man, a prophet’. According to classical Arabic dictionaries, *ṣiddīq* is one who has reached perfection in telling the truth, whose truthfulness has been demonstrated abundantly and who has never told a lie, one who is so used to speaking the truth as a matter of habit that he cannot tell a lie. ... To say that Abraham told a lie on three occasions is highly insulting and derogatory to his dignity. ... But our Ulama cannot bear to accept that a reporter of hadith could have made a mistake, yet they are ready to accept that a prophet could have told a lie whom the Quran gives the title of *ṣiddīq*. I see no reason why this hadith should not be rejected” (*Faḍl-ul-Bārī*, under hadith 3357)

Two of those three occasions are said to be mentioned in the Quran. Both those two are in connection with the famous incident when Abraham broke the idols of his people while they were away. Abraham had been arguing with his people about the falseness of the gods that they worshipped. The Quran says in relation to this: “Then he glanced a glance at the stars, and said: Surely I am sick (of your deities). So they turned their backs on him, going away” (37:88–90). It appears that Abraham’s people were going to some pagan festival but Abraham didn’t want to join them. Some commentators of the Quran say that he made the excuse “I am sick” in order to avoid going with them so that he could remain behind and break the idols in their temple.

This is allegedly one of his lies. In the Saudi Arabian official English translation of the Quran mentioned above it is added in brackets after “I am sick”: “He did this trick to remain in their temple of idols to destroy them and not to accompany them to the pagans feast”. Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his English translation of the Quran, has also added something in brackets after “I am sick” and that is: “of your deities”. He says in his footnote that these words mean either “I am sick of your worshipping what is not God” or “I bear spite to your false gods”, not that “I am suffering from some illness”.

In his Urdu commentary of the Quran, *Bayan-ul-Quran*, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes: “To say that Abraham lied in the way of Allah is absurd. The way of Allah and an evil deed cannot go together. Just as telling a lie is not allowed under any circumstances, theft, for example, is also not allowed under any circumstances. If an idol is decorated with gold jewellery, it is not allowed to steal that jewellery even if your intention is to spend it on a good cause. Similarly, it is not allowed to tell a lie in order to get the opportunity to smash an idol. The mention of Abraham glancing at the stars before saying ‘I am sick’ shows that the meaning is ‘I am sick of what you worship’ because his people also worshipped stars.” (See under verse 37:89).

The other lie Abraham is alleged to have told is what he said to people after they returned. It is related in the Quran in the account in chapter 21 that Abraham had said to his people: “And, by Allah! I will certainly plan against your idols after you go away, turning your backs” (21:57). This shows that he warned his people about his intention and did not make a false excuse to them as to why he wanted to stay behind. The Quran then tells us: “So he broke them into pieces, **except the chief of them**, that perhaps they might return to it” (21:58). When the people returned, says the Quran, they asked him: “Have you done this to our gods, Abraham?” (21:62) His reply is translated in almost all English translations in words such as: “No, it was this, the chief of them, who has done it. So ask them if they can speak” (21:63). This is supposed to be the “lie” he told, that he said that it was the chief idol who had broken the other idols. But Maulana Muhammad Ali has shown that these words can also be translated as: “Indeed someone has done it. This is the chief of them. So ask them if

they can speak.” While preparing this *khutba* I discovered that there is a publication entitled *A Word for Word Translation of the Quran in English* by two Muslim ladies, Shehnaz Shaikh and Kausar Khatri. This book, under each Arabic word of any verse, gives the translation of that word, and also the complete translation of the whole verse. This verse is translated there as: “He said, Nay, (some doer) did it. This is their chief. So ask them if they can speak.”

So Abraham did not say that the chief idol has done it and they can ask him if he is able to speak. What he said was: Someone has, of course, done it, and you can ask their chief, who remains safe and sound, or ask the broken idols, who broke them. It appears that Abraham’s people had warned Abraham that if he spoke against their idols, their idols would bring him to harm. So he showed them that, far from the idols harming him, he could harm the idols. He also demonstrated to them that their idols had no power to defend themselves, nor could their idols even tell them who had attacked them so that they could punish the attacker.

Even supposing Abraham had said that the chief idol had broken the other idols, he may be indicating by this that there can only be one god. Those who worship numerous gods always have a hierarchy of gods, with one supreme or chief god above all the other gods. If he is the chief god, he can remove the lower gods from their position, so that he remains the one and only God. This may have been Abraham’s argument to them. And in the same way, Allah has complete power over all those who are taken as gods by people.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-