

Angelic Inspiration And Satanic Whispering: The Speech Of Allah

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Al-Mizan, Vol. 5, Under Commentary of Surah 'Aali-'Imran: Verses 35 – 41

We have repeatedly mentioned that when a word is made for a meaning, it actually looks at the main purpose behind that meaning. The words, “talk” and “speech”, refer to voice, because voice conveys the idea of the speaker to the hearer. Therefore, whatever conveys that idea may be called a talk or speech. It may be a voice or a combination of several voices; in fact, it may not have any sound at all, as for example, is the case with sign language and symbols. If a siren conveys a complete idea, it may be called a speech, even though it is not uttered by mouth. Likewise, people use the word, “speech”, for signs and symbols although no sound is involved in them.

It is for this reason that the Qur'an uses the words, “speech” and “talk”, for the ideas created in man's mind by the Satan. Allah narrates the claim of the Satan:

“And most certainly I will...bid them so that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most certainly I will bid them so that they shall alter Allah's creation...” (4:119).

Also, He says:

“Like the Satan when he says to man: ‘Disbelieve’, but when he disbelieves, he says: ‘I am surely, clear of you...’” (59:16).

“... the slinking [Satan] who whispers into the hearts of men...” (114:5).

“... the Satans from among men and jinn, some of them suggesting to others varnished falsehood to deceive [them]...” (6:112).

“And the Satan shall say...: ‘surely, Allah promised you the promise of truth, and I gave you

promises then failed to keep them to you'...” (14:22).

“Satan threatens you with poverty and enjoins you to abomination, and Allah promises you forgiveness from Himself and abundance; and Allah is Ample-giving, All-knowing” (2:268).

“He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good” (2:269).

Clearly, these misleading ideas, coming into a man's mind, have been ascribed to the Satan, and have been called his bid, order, talk, whispering, suggestion, promise and threat; all these are various modes of speech and talk, although the Satan does not utter them by mouth, nor does the man hear them by his ears.

The last quoted verse mentions the promise of Allah – for forgiveness and abundance – face to face with the satanic threat. It implies that this promise stands for an angelic inspiration in contrast to the satanic whispering. And that inspiration has been termed as “wisdom”. Also, there are other verses pointing to this reality in various terms. For example:

“... and [He will] make for you a light with which you will walk...” (57:28).

“He it is Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they might have more of faith added to their faith – and Allah's are the hosts of the heaven and the earth...” (48:4).

(We have explained this verse while writing about as-sakinah [السَّكِينَةُ = tranquillity] under the verse: ***“...in which there is tranquillity from your lord...” (2:248).***)

“Therefore [for] whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam; and [for] whomsoever He intends that He should leave him to err, He makes his breast strait and narrow as though he were ascending into the sky; thus does Allah lay uncleanness on those who do not believe” (6: 125).

It should be noted here that the satanic whispering has been called “the uncleanness of the Satan” in the verse 8:11.

The above discourse makes it clear that the Satan and the angels “speak” to man by putting ideas into his mind.

Then there is a speaking reserved for Allah, as He says:

“And there is not for any man that Allah should speak to him except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger so that he reveals by His permission what He pleases” (42:51).

Apart from sending a messenger, that is, an angel (with which we are not concerned here), Allah speaks to man in two ways:

- (i) Revelation, in which there is no veil between Allah and the person spoken to;
- (ii) Speaking from behind a veil or curtain.

These are, in short, various kinds of angelic inspiration and satanic whispering; and various modes of Allah's speech.

As for the Divine Speech which is called revelation, it needs no extraneous factor for its recognition, no other distinguishing element to ascertain its authenticity. It is a direct speech, without any curtain between Allah and the recipient of the revelation; and it is just impossible for any doubt to creep up into such a talk. But other kinds of Divine Speech need some supporting evidence, which in its turn relies on the direct revelation.

As for a distinction between the angelic and the satanic talks, the signs mentioned in the above quoted verses are sufficient to separate one from the other. The angelic inspiration accompanies expanding of breast, calls to Divine forgiveness and abundance, and encourages man to follow the religion of Allah as expounded in the Divine Book and the prophetic sunnah. The satanic whispering, on the other hand, causes the breast to be strait and narrow, tempts one to follow one's desire, threatens with poverty, enjoins abomination, and finally pushes one to act in a manner opposed to the Book of Allah and the sunnah, and contrary to the demands of the healthy nature.

The prophets and their close followers sometimes saw and recognized the angels and the Satan, as Allah describes in the stories of Adam, Ibrahim, and Lut (peace be on them). Obviously, in such cases, there was no need for any extraneous identifying factor. But in other cases when they did not see the angel (or the Satan), they, like other believers, needed some identification to ascertain that the speaker was in fact from Allah – and that identification ultimately depended on the direct revelation from Allah.

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