?What is Raj‘ah “Return” and why do the Shias believe in it

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Reply: In Arabic, raj‘ah literally means “return” but it is used to mean “the return of a group of people after death and prior to the Day of Resurrection”. This truth is contradictory to neither reason nor the logic of revelation.

From the viewpoint of Islam and other divine creeds, the essence of man consists in his absolute soul, which is also described as the “self” {nafs}, and after the extinction of the body it continues to exist forever.

On the other hand, God, the Exalted, from the viewpoint of the Qur’an, is Omnipotent whose power nothing can hinder or limit.

This short introduction makes clear that raj‘ah, from the viewpoint of reason, is not impossible; for, we will find through reflection that the revival of this group of people is far easier than God’s first creation of them.

Therefore, the Lord Who created them in the first time is undoubtedly capable of reviving them.

According to the logic of revelation, there are examples of raj‘ah in the past nations.

In this regard, the Glorious Qur’an says:

“And when you said, ‘O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allah visibly.’ Thereupon, a thunderbolt seized you as you looked on. Then We raised you up after your death so that you might give thanks.”

Elsewhere, the Qur’an quotes ‘Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah) (‘a) as saying:

“And I revive the dead by Allah’s leave.”

The Holy Qur’an not only endorses the possibility of raj‘ah but also affirms the occurrence and certainty of the revival of a group of people after their departing the world. In the two verses below, the Qur’an points to the return of a group of people after death and prior to the occurrence of the Day of Resurrection.

“And when the word {of judgment} falls upon them, We shall bring them an Animal from the earth who shall speak to them that the people had no faith in Our signs. That day We shall resurrect from every nation a group of those who denied Our signs, and they shall be held in check.”

In order to provide a good ground for proving the question of raj‘ah on the basis of these two verses, let us consider the following points:

1. The exegetes of the Qur’an {mufassirun} think that these two verses talk about the Day of

Resurrection and the first one discusses one of the pre-Resurrection signs just as Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti narrates in his exegesis {tafsir}, Ad-Durr al-Manthur, on the authority of Ibn Abi Shaybah from Hudhayfah that khuruj ad-dabbah (in the first verse) is among the events which precede the Day of Resurrection.

2. There is no doubt that on the Day of Resurrection, all human beings shall be mustered and not only a specific group from every community. Regarding the mustering of all human beings, the Qur'an states:

"That is a day on which all mankind will be gathered."

And in another place, it states:

"The day We shall set the mountains moving and you will see the earth in full view, We shall muster them, and We will not leave out anyone of them."

Therefore, on the Day of Resurrection all human beings shall be gathered, and not only a specific group.

3. The second of the aforementioned two verses points clearly to the mustering of a particular group from every community, and not all human beings, as is stated below:

"That day We shall resurrect from every nation a group of those who denied Our signs, and they shall be held in check."

This statement points clearly to the fact that not all human beings will be mustered.

Conclusion: These three short preliminaries show clearly that the mustering of a particular group of human beings who denied the divine signs, as deduced from the second verse, is an event that shall happen prior to the Day of Resurrection. This is because on the Day of Resurrection the mustering includes the entire humanity and it is not limited to a particular group.

This clarification proves the idea of the return of a group of human beings after death and before the Resurrection, and this phenomenon is referred to as raj'ah.

On this basis, the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (S), who are equal to the Qur'an and who are interpreters of the divine revelation, elucidate this fact, and for the sake of brevity we quote only two of their sayings:

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says:

"The Days of Allah are three: the day of (uprising of) Hadrat al-Qa'im (Imam al-Mahdi) ('a), the day of 'return' and the Day of Resurrection."

He ('a) also says:

"He who does not believe in our 'return' does not belong to us."

:At this juncture, it is proper to highlight two important points

1. The philosophy of raj'ah

In analyzing the motives of raj'ah, we encounter two sublime aims the first of which is to show the real beauty and splendor of Islam and the ignominy of kufr {disbelief}, and the second is to reward the faithful and beneficent human beings and chastise the unbelievers and oppressors.

2. The main difference between raj'ah and tanasukh {transmigration}

It is necessary to point out that in the view of the Shi'ah the issue of raj'ah never entails believing in transmigration {tanasukh}, for the theory of transmigration is grounded on the denial of Resurrection and regards the world in perpetual cycle and every cycle is a repetition of the previous one.

According to this theory, the soul of every man returns after death to the world and unite another body. Thus, if the soul was good in the previous time (life), it will unite a body with which it will enjoy a good life, but if it was among the bad ones, it will unite a body with which it will face a difficult life. And this return represents its resurrection!

Conversely, because those who believe in raj'ah abide by the Islamic law, they believe in the Day of Resurrection and think that it is impossible for the soul which has separated from the body to unite another body.

Rather, they believe that a group of human beings shall return to this world before the Resurrection and after the wisdoms and profit of return are accomplished, they shall die again and be mustered with the rest of human beings on the Day of Resurrection. And after the separation of soul from the body, the soul will never transfer to another body.