

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ

عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَأَجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) 5:90

O You Who Believe!

- Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination of Satan's handwork.
- Eschew such (abomination).
- That you may prosper.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

It has been mentioned earlier in volume two of the book (al-Mizan [Eng], vol.3, pp.279-80 [tr.]) under the verse: They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: "In both of them there is a great sin and (some) profit for men; and their sin is greater than their profit." (2:219); and in volume four (al-Mizan [Eng],vol.8,pp.233-4 [tr.]) under the verse: O you who believe! Do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know (well) what you say, (4:43).

That these two verses together with the verse: Say: "My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin (7:33), and the verses under discussion, i.e.: O you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an abomination of the Satan's handiwork; shun it therefore that you may be successful.

The Satan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist? If these verses are studied together, their diverse context shows that the Legislator had adopted a course of gradual progression in prohibition of intoxicants.

The meanings of intoxicant, games of chance, sacrificing to set up stones and dividing by arrows have been explained earlier.

Al-Khamr is every intoxicating fermented liquid, which covers the reason. *Al-Maysir* is gambling of any type.

Al-Ansab means the idols or stones which were set up for slaughtering the sacrificial animals upon, and which were held in esteem and considered a source of blessings.

Al-Azlam were the arrows used for division of a camel's shares; often this name was given to the arrows used for omen before beginning an important work like journey, etc..

But this word has been used in the chapter's beginning for the former meaning (because it is included among the things unlawful to eat); therefore, it has the same meaning in this verse too.

A Note on Istikharah

What is *istikharah*? When man intends to embark on an important work, it is possible for him to know its appropriateness, by using the power of thought which Allah has given him, or by seeking the advice of those who have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. However, if these two methods fail to make him recognize the correct way, and he is still bewildered, then he should choose his course of action after paying some attention to his Lord and seeking His help.

When man chooses what he chooses through this type of seeking good, or *istikharah*, he cannot be accused of claiming to know the unseen; nor does he meddle with the divine affairs, which are exclusively reserved with Allah. It does not involve allowing someone other than Allah to join with Him in management of affairs, nor it entails any other religious problem because the only function of *istikharah* is to decide positively or negatively about a course of action without making it obligatory or unlawful or giving it any other shade of religious responsibility. Also, it does not claim to unveil the good or the evil that is hidden behind the curtains of the unseen. It only shows what is better for the man concerned whether he should or should not do that work; in this way he comes out of bewilderment and hesitation [with a firm resolve.]

As for what follows that action or non-action, it may turn out to be good and it may equally result in evil – in the same way as it happens when a man opts for a course of action by his own thinking or by someone's advice. Thus, *istikharah*, like one's own thinking or well-wishers' advice, is merely a way to remove hesitation or confusion while taking a practical step; and the result of acting upon it is not different from that of an action done by one's own meditation or by someone's advice.

Of course, someone may think looking at the traditions about seeking good omens from the Qur'an, etc., that it entails a sort of a claim of the knowledge of the unseen; because often the soul expects from it good or bad result, or benefit or harm. But it has been narrated in correction hadith, through the chains of both sects that the Prophet (S) sought good omen by good things and ordered it, and forbade (to believe in) ill omen and ordered to pass over it and rely on Allah.

Therefore, there is nothing to prevent seeking omen from the Qur'an, etc.; if the result of that omen seeking is good, it is OK. Otherwise, he should proceed ahead in that affair relying on Allah, the High. Its ultimate effect is to create satisfaction in mind about the affairs and actions, which he believes, would bring happiness and benefit to him. We shall write on this topic in detail in a place devoted to it particularly.

Now, it is clear that some exegetes are totally wrong when they have taken the 'arrows' as referring to their practice of oracle seeking; and then arriving at a conclusion that istikharah was unlawful.

All this shows that when intoxicants and other items are called abominations of the Satan's handiwork, it is because these items are ultimately based on the Satan's action which is exclusively related to him; and his modus operandi is creating ideas in man's heart – the Satanic whispering that calls him to error. That is why it is called abomination or uncleanness; Allah has called error as uncleanness, as He says: 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 (6:126).

What is the connotation of intoxicants and other items being an abomination of the Satan's handiwork? The next verse clarifies it: The Satan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. That is, the Satan's motive in calling you to intoxicants and games of chance is nothing except evil; thus it is an abomination of his handiwork.

Az-Zamakhshari has written:

Three verses were revealed on the subject of intoxicants:

They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance,..... (2:219). Some Muslims then left it and some continued to drink; until a man drank it, began his prayers, and talked nonsense.

Then was revealed: O you who believe! Do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know (well) what you say, (4:43). Still some Muslims continued drinking it; until Umar drank it; then he took a jaw-bone of a camel and bashed with it the skull of Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf, and then sat lamenting those (unbelievers) who were killed in the battle of Badr, reciting the poem of al-Aswad ibn Yaghfur:

*How many spears (i.e. braves) and noble drinkers are (thrown)
In the well – the well of Badr?
How many nobles and feeders of humps are (here)
In the well – the well of Badr?
Does Ibn Abi Kabshah* threaten us that we shall be made alive again?
And how can (happen) the life of ghosts and skulls?
Is he helpless in averting death from me?
And will raise me (again) when my bones become rotten?
Well, who will convey my message to the Beneficent (God)
That I am abandoning the month of fast;
So tell Allah to stop my drink from me,
And tell Allah to stop my food from me.*

*The Polytheists of Quraysh used this nickname for the Prophet (S) in a sneering manner.

This (news) reached the Messenger of Allah (S) and he came out enraged, dragging his cloak along; he raised something that was in his hand to strike him (Umar). So he (Umar) said, “I seek refuge in Allah from the wrath of Allah and the wrath of His Messenger.” Then Allah, the Glorified, the Sublime, sent down (the verse): The Satan only desires to cause enmity and hatred Will you then desist? So Umar said, “We desist.”
(Rabiu-abrar)

Ibn Jarir, Ibnul-Mundhir, Ibn Abi Hatim, Abu ‘sh-Shaykh, Ibn Marduwayh, and an-Nahhas (in his an-Nasiikh) have narrated from Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas that he said,

Regarding me was revealed the prohibition of intoxicants.

A man from the Helpers prepared a feast, and he invited us. People came to him, ate, and drank until they became intoxicated with liquor – and it was before the intoxicants were prohibited. So they began boasting.

The Helpers said, ‘The Helpers are superior;’ and the Quraysh said, ‘The Quraysh are superior.’

Then a man came down with a jaw-bone of a camel and hit at my nose tearing it – and Sa’d’s nose was torn.” He said, “Then I came to the Prophet (S) and mentioned it to him. So this verse was revealed: O you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance” (ad-Durr Manthur)

The traditions about the stories, which resulted in prohibition of intoxicants are numerous, through the Sunni chains, with great discrepancies among them. As for those traditions which mention some companions who had been drinking, we have no concern to go into them analyzing and sifting, because our purpose is to explain the Qur'anic verse. However these narratives support what we have written in the Commentary that these verses imply, nay, rather clearly say, that a group of Muslims had not left drinking liquor since the verse, 2:219 was revealed until these verses of chapter vie came down.

Of course, some traditions say that Ali (AS) and Uthman ibn Maz'un had forbidden intoxicants to themselves before the verse of prohibition was revealed; and it has been mentioned in al-Milal wan-Nihal, that a few Arabs in the era of Ignorance had forbidden intoxicants to themselves, and Allah helped some of them to find Islam and enter into its fold.

Among them were Amir ibn az-Zarib al-Udwani and Qays ibn Amir at-Tamimi (who attained Islam). Also, among them were Safwan ibn Umayyah ibn Muhrith al-Kanani, Afif ibn Ma'di Karb al-Kindi, al-Uslum al-Yami (who forbade to himself broth intoxicants and fornication). These few individuals were those on whose tongue the word of truth had appeared. Otherwise, generally the Arabs of that era like all other people of the world (except the Jews) were habituated to drink freely, until Allah forbade it in His Book.

It appears from the verses of the mighty Book that intoxicants were forbidden in Makkah before the hijrah, as is shown by the verse: Say: "My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin and rebellion without justice" (7:33). It is a Makkan verse; and when it is joined to the divine words: They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: "In both of them there is a great sin and (some) profit for men, and their sin is greater than their profit." (2:219); which is Madinite verse revealed in early days of hijrah, there does not remain room for any doubt that at that time its prohibition was clear to the Muslims.

And if we meditate on the context of the verses of the chapter 5, "The Table", and especially on the implications of the words: *Will you then desist?* And the verse: There is no blame on those who believe and do good deeds for what they have eaten, when they fear Allah and believe it will be clear that the indulgence of a group among them in drinking liquor between the revelation of chapter 2 and 5, was a residue of the previous bad habits. It was like some people's continuing to sinfully cohabit in the nights of Ramadan until Allah revealed: It is made lawful to you on the night of the fast to go in unto your wives; they are an apparel to you and you are an apparel for them; Allah knew that you were acting unfaithfully to yourselves, so He has turned to you (mercifully) and forgave you (2:187).

(al-Kulayni and ash-Shaykh) have narrated through their chains from Abu Ja'far (AS) that he said,

Allah did never raise any prophet but it was in Allah's knowledge that when He would perfect his religion it would include prohibition of intoxicants; and intoxicants were always unlawful, but they are only carried away from [one] trait to [another] trait; and if it were imposed on them all together, it would have cut them off short of religion.

(The narrator) said, Abu Ja'far (AS) said,

There is no one more kind than Allah, the Sublime; and it is from His kindness (the Blessed, the Sublime) that He transfers them from (one) trait to (another) trait; and if He had imposed on them all together, they would have perished.

(al-Kafi; at-Tahdhib)

Abus-Sabah narrates that he asked Abu Abdillah (AS) about *nabidh* and intoxicants, Do they have the same position? (The Imam a.s.) said,

No. Surely *nabidh* is not of the rank of intoxicants. Certainly, Allah has prohibited intoxicants a little of it and more of it, as He has prohibited dead body, blood and flesh of swine; and the Prophet (S) has prohibited the intoxicant from among the drinks, and what the Messenger of Allah (S) has prohibited, Allah has prohibited it.

(at-Tafsir, al-Ayyashi)

al-Kulayni and ash-Shaykh) have narrated through their chains from Musa ibn Ja'far (AS) that he said,

Verily, Allah has not prohibited the liquor because of its name; but He has prohibited it because of its effect. Therefore, anything, which has the effect of liquor, is liquor. (In another version, the last sentence is, 'Therefore, anything which the action of liquor is liquor.'

(al-Kafi, at-Tahdhib)

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Intoxicating agents and gambling have been prohibited through al Baqarah : 219 (see commentary). Many scholars (Abu Hanifa, Hakim Ibn Sad, Suyuti, Shibli, Ibn Hajar) have mentioned in their books about the *nabidh* (barley malt) held lawful and taken by some of the Holy Prophet 's companions.

In Shi-a fiqh all intoxicating agents are held unlawful.

The Holy Prophet said:

Do not visit a sick person if he drinks wine (or any intoxicating drink), if he dies do not attend his funeral prayers, if he is in distress do not give him alms; and it is like throwing your daughter into hell if you marry her to a drunkard.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

According to the Ahlul-Bayt all the prophets of Allah were strict abstainers from intoxicating drinks. Hashim, Abdul Muttalib, Abdullah, Abu Talib, Jafar, Ali and the Holy Prophet, followers of the creed of Ibrahim, never touched any intoxicating drink. Some new converts continued wine-drinking till verse 219 of al Baqarah was revealed. Yet, not satisfied with the manner of its revelation, they did not altogether abandon their old habit. Then verse 43 of al Nisa was revealed. Still drinking parties were held in secret. Once, in such a gathering, where some of his prominent companions were enjoying wholeheartedly, the Holy Prophet came and recited these verses.

"We will keep away from it. We will keep away from it! O Messenger of Allah!" said the companions.

After that total prohibition prevailed. According to Iqdul Farid even after the total prohibition, a renowned companion of the Holy Prophet used to drink the nabidh on the plea that without it he could not digest camel's meat, because of which some Muslim jurists think that use of nabidh is permissible .

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

At the time of the advent of Islam, the Arabs customarily were intensively interested in poetry, wine, and fighting. The Divine revelations concerning the prohibition of wine were gradually conveyed.

At first, there revealed a verse stating that provision is supplied from date and grapes either, from which you can obtain intoxication, too, (Sure (An-Nahl, No. 16, verse 67) . This indication of intoxication implies the statement of its badness.

The Qur'an, then, has referred to the benefits of gambling and wine and also that their containing sin is greater than their benefits, (Sura (Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 219) . After that the Divine verse was revealed enjoining not to establish prayer at the state of being intoxicated, (Sura An-Nisa', No. 4, verse 43) . And, finally, the above verse was revealed which considered wine as an abomination, a Satanic action, and ordained that it is unlawful - Musnad Ahmad-i-Hanbal, Sunan-i-Abi-Dawood, Nisaiee, and Tarmadhi

The Arabic term /khamr/ (wine) is derived from the same root as the Arabic word /khumur/ (cover) is. In Arabic, the veil of a woman is called /khimar/; since it covers the hairs. Similarly, wine covers the wisdom.

The Arabic term /maysir/ is derived from /yusr/ with the meaning of easiness, since, in gambling, players sometimes earn money by that play without tolerating any trouble.

The Qur'anic term /'azlam/ means a kind of lottery done with some sticks of arrows. It used to be performed before Islam, at the Age of Ignorance.

Explanations :

1. In Islam, having Faith and drinking wine do not agree with each other.

2. Drinking wine and gambling are in the same row with idolatry.

"... verily wine, gambling, idols and ..."

3. The Islamic commandments and prohibitions have been ordained reasonably and wisely.

"... and (dividing by) arrows are an abomination of the Satan's work, so avoid it ..."

4. The verse enjoins to avoid not only drinking wine, but also approaching it. The reason of this ordinance is that a sound nutrition is effective in the prosperity of human beings. Therefore, it enjoins to avoid intoxication, so that you may be prosperous. The verse says:

"... So avoid it, that you may be prosperous."

Any kind of cooperation concerning wine, including its production, distribution and consumption, is prohibited.

Imam Baqir (AS) has narrated from the holy Prophet (S) that he cursed ten groups of people who are concerned somehow with drinking wine. They are as follows :

Its planter, its guardian, its maker, its drinker, its cupbearer, its bearer, its receiver, its seller, its purchaser, and anyone who, in a way, devours from its income.