

men altogether, there is nothing objectionable in it, for Allah alone knows the wisdom that lies in His choice, and He makes these changes for the good of men. In fact, He always sends another verse or injunction better than, or at least equal to, what He has abrogated. Allah being omnipotent and omniscient, He possesses the authority to change His commandments as He likes, and He also knows what is good for men at a particular time, and makes these changes according to this knowledge. Men have no friend or helper except Allah. As friend, Allah keeps their good in view while laying down injunctions. As helper, He protects those who obey His commandments against the hostility of their foes - but if the obedient are to receive blessings in the other world greater than the harm they have to suffer in this world, the apparent domination of their foes does not really matter.

What is *Naskh*? (Abrogation)

Verse 106 speaks of Allah abrogating certain verses, or making men forget certain others. The first phrase of the verse, thus covers all the possible forms in which a verse of the Qur'ān can be abrogated. The Arabic word in the text is *Naskh*, which has two lexical meanings - (1) to write, and (2) to abolish, to repeal. According to the consensus of all the commentators, the word has been employed in this verse in the second sense -- that is, the repeal or abrogation of an injunction. So, in the terminology of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*, *Naskh* (نسخ) signifies the promulgation of an injunction in place of another -- whether the later injunction merely consists in the repeal of the earlier or, substitutes a new regulation in its place. The other form of *Naskh* mentioned in this verse is that sometimes Allah made the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the blessed Companions forget a certain verse altogether. The commentators have cited several instances of this kind of *Naskh*, and the purpose in such cases has usually been to repeal a certain regulation.

The kinds of abrogation

Making laws and repealing them to promulgate new ones in their stead is a regular and well-known practice in human governments and institutions. But in the case of man-made laws abrogation takes place sometimes because the law-makers do not understand the situation properly while making a certain law, and have to change it when they

realize their mistakes, and sometimes because when a law is promulgated, it is in accord with the prevailing situation, but when quite unforeseen changes alter the situation, the law too has to be changed. But these two forms of abrogation are out of the question in the case of divine injunctions.

There is, however, a third form too. The lawmaker makes a law, knowing fully well that the circumstances are going to change in such a way that the law will no longer be suitable for the new situation; so, when the situation changes as he already knew, he changes the law too, and promulgates a new one which he had thought of at the very start. For example, a physician prescribes a medicine for a patient in view of his present conditions, but he knows that when the patient has been using it for two days, his condition will change and require a new medicine -- with this realization, he prescribes a medicine suitable for that day, but two days later, when circumstances have changed, he prescribes a new one. The physician can easily give the patient written instructions for the whole course of the treatment, with all the changes in the medicines duly indicated. But this would be putting too much burden on the already feeble patient, and there would also be the danger of some harm through a possible error or misunderstanding.

This is the only form of abrogation which can occur, and has been occurring in divine injunctions and in divine books. Every new Shari'ah and every new revealed Book has been abrogating many injunctions of the earlier Shari'ah and of the earlier Book. Similarly, within the same Shari'ah, too, it has always happened that a certain law was in force for a time, but Divine Wisdom chose to abrogate it and to promulgate another in its place. A *hadith* reported by Muslim says: "لم تكن نبوة قط الا تاسخت : There has never been a prophethood which did not abrogate some injunctions." This is a principle which it should not be difficult to understand. It was only some malicious and ignorant Jews who confused the divine abrogation of injunctions with the two forms of the repeal of man-made laws, and began, in their impudence, to taunt the Holy Prophet ﷺ - in reply to which, as we have said, these two verses were revealed. (Ibn Jarir, Ibn Kathir etc.)

As for the Muslims, it was probably in their desire to avoid giving occasion to the enemies of Islam for such taunts that some from among

the *Mu'tazilah* tried to explain away the whole question of *Naskh*. Logically speaking, there is a possibility -- so ran their argument -- of abrogation in the case of divine injunctions, and the possibility cannot be denied on any rational ground, but abrogation has not actually occurred in the Holy Qur'ān, and there is no verse in the Holy Book which abrogates another (*Nāsikh*) and no verse which has been abrogated (*Mansūkh*). This view is attributed to Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī, but the 'Ulama' in general have always rejected this opinion, and refuted the argument. Thus, we read in "Rūh al-Ma'ānī":

واتفقت اهل الشرائع على جواز النسخ و وقوعه وخالف اليهود
غير العيسوية في جوازه وقالوا: يمتنع عقلاً وأبو مسلم الاصفهاني في
وقوعه فقال: إنه وإن جاز عقلاً لكنه لم يقع

"The people belonging to all the Shari'ahs are unanimous in accepting the validity of abrogation and its actual occurrence both. Only the Jews -- with the exception of their 'Isawiyah sect have denied the possibility of abrogation, and Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī has denied its occurrence, for he says that it is rationally possible, but has not actually taken place."

Imām al-Qurṭubī says:

معرفة هذا الباب أكيدة و فائدته عظيمة لا تستغنى عن معرفته العلماء
ولا ينكره إلا الجهلة الأغبياء

"It is essential to understand the question of abrogation, and great benefits flow from such an understanding, which no scholar can dispense with, and no one can deny abrogation except the ignorant and the dull-headed."

In this connection, al-Qurṭubī has related a very illuminating incident. The fourth *Khalīfah* Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه saw a man preaching in the mosque. He asked the people what the man was doing. On being told that he was preaching, the blessed *Khalīfah* said: "He is not doing anything of the sort, but only announcing to the people that he is such and such a man and the son of such and such, and asking them to recognize and remember him." Calling the man to his side, he asked: "Do you know the injunctions which have been abrogated and those which have abrogated the earlier ones?" When he confessed that he did not, the *Khalīfah* turned him out of the mosque, and ordered him never to preach there.

It is not feasible to cite here all the sayings of the blessed Companions and their immediate Successors (*Tābi'īn*) which affirm the actual occurrence of abrogation in the case of injunctions laid down by the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadīth*. Some of these have been quoted, along with the evidence for the authenticity of the reports, in the commentaries of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Kathīr etc. and in "Al-Durr al-Manthur". As for the reports less strongly authenticated, they are just innumerable. That is why there has always been a total consensus of the '*Ulamā*' on the question of *Naskh*, except for Abu Muslim al-Isfahānī and a few others from among the *Mu'tazilah* who have denied the actual occurrence of abrogation -- but Imām Rāzī has, in his commentary, exposed in detail the hollowness of their opinion.

The terminology of the *Naskh*

It is also essential to keep in mind a certain distinction in the use of the word *Naskh* as a technical term of the Shari'ah. The technical sense of the word implies changing an injunction, and replacing one injunction by another. Now, this change may consist in repealing an injunction altogether and replacing it by another (for example, fixing the Ka'bah as the Qiblah -- the direction towards which Muslims turn in their prayers -- instead of the *Baytul-Maqdis*); the change may equally consist in retaining an injunction but adding certain condition and provisions to it. The '*Ulama*' of the early period of Islam have used the word *Naskh* in this general and comprehensive sense which includes the total repeal of an injunction as well as a partial change in an injunction with the addition of certain conditions, provisions or exceptions. That is why the '*Ulamā*' of the earlier period have indicated some five hundred verses of the Holy Qur'an which, according to them, have been abrogated.

But, according to the '*Ulamā*' of a later period, only that change is to be called a *Naskh* which cannot in any way be brought into consonance with an earlier injunction. Obviously, this approach greatly reduces the number of abrogated verses. For example, there are, according to al-Suyūṭī, only twenty such verses. Later on, Shāh Waliyyullah, seeking to bring the abrogated injunctions in consonance with the earlier injunctions, reduced the number of abrogated verses to only five -- these being the cases where later injunctions could not

be made to correspond with the earlier ones without far-fetched interpretations. This effort is highly commendable, because the basic postulate behind an injunction is its permanence, while abrogation goes against this postulate, and hence it is not proper to posit abrogation in a verse laying down an injunction which can, in some justifiable manner, be shown to be still valid.

But this effort to reduce the number of abrogated verses does not, and cannot in the least imply ²⁸ that the presence of abrogation is in any way -- may Allah forgive us for reproducing a blasphemy -- a shortcoming or defect in the Holy Qur'ān or Islām, that the 'Ulamā' have for the last fourteen hundred years been trying to remove it, that the ultimate inspiration came to Shāh Waliyyullāh whose extraordinary achievement lies in having reduced the number of abrogated verses to five, and that now one may wait for a few geniuses who would bring the number down to zero.

To adopt such an approach towards the question of "*Naskh*" is no service to Islam or to the Holy Qur'ān,²⁹ nor can it obliterate the profound investigations into truth of the matter made by the blessed Companions, their Successors, and the 'Ulamā' of the generations that followed them during the last fourteen hundred years, nor can it stop the recriminations of the enemies of Islam. In fact, all it would do is to furnish a weapon to the present-day traducers of Islam and those who wish to rebel against Islam, who would now be saying that what the 'Ulamā' of the Islamic *Ummah* have been maintaining on the subject for the last fourteen hundred years has finally proved to be wrong. May Allah forbid such a thing! If this door is opened, it would let in all kinds of disorders, and all the injunctions of the Sharī'ah would come under suspicion. Then, is there any guarantee that the results of this "modernistic" research would not turn out to be wrong tomorrow!

We have come across certain recent writings in which an attempt has been made to revive the argument of Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī.

28. As the 'modernists' have been all too impatient to believe.

29. To which pretends the whole tribe of self-styled scholars, researchers, "experts in Islamic studies" and "revivificateurs of Islam."

Such writers begin with the assumption that the Arabic word *Mā* in verse 106 is not a relative or adverbial pronoun signifying "whenever", or "whichever" but a conjunction implying "if" that introduces a conditional clause; so, they translate the first phrase of the the verse not as "whichever verse We abrogate", but as "if We abrogate a verse", and say that the statement pertains to a supposition or to an imaginary situation as do the phrases beginning with the Arabic word *Law* (لَوْ : if) -- for example: لَوْ كَانَ فِيهَا إِلَهٌ : "If there were in the sky and the earth another god beside Allah" (21:22) or إِنَّ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ : "If the All-Merciful had a son" (43:81). On this basis, they argue that abrogation is possible, but has never actually occurred. Such writers, we are afraid, do not show an intimate knowledge of Arabic grammar, for there is a great deal of difference between a condition suggested by the word *Mā* and the imaginary situation introduced by the conjunction *Law*. Moreover, it is on the basis of this verse itself that the blessed Companions have affirmed the occurrence of abrogation, and have even cited many instances. So have their Successors and all authentic Commentators. In view of such unanimity, the new-fangled interpretation cannot be acceptable. Even Shāh Waliyyullāh, in reducing the number of abrogated verses, has never thought of denying the fact of abrogation. In short, all the authentic and authoritative 'Ulamā', from the days of the blessed Companions down to our own day, have always affirmed not only the possibility, but also the actual occurrence of abrogation. This has been the position of all the 'Ulamā' of Deoband too, without any exception.

The injunctions with regard to abrogation are too many and too intricate to be discussed here -- they properly belong to the books on the Principles of Jurisprudence.

Verse 108

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ
وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ۝

Or, do you rather want to ask your Prophet as Mūsā was asked earlier? And whoever takes to infidelity in exchanges of faith has certainly missed the straight path. (Verse 108)