

all these turn into a second nature in terms of the circumstances, habits and customs everyone lives with. Thus, what one does remains subservient to it. (Qurṭubī) In this verse, human beings have been warned that they must abstain from bad surroundings, bad company and bad habits and take to the company of good people and inculcate good habits (al-Jaṣṣāṣ). The reason, as stated earlier, is that one's response pattern built up under the influence of surrounding, company and custom makes one do what it dictates. Imām al-Jaṣṣāṣ has also given another meaning of 'shākilah' at this place, that of 'like.' Given this meaning, the sense of the verse would be that everyone feels comfortable with a person who is compatible with one's temperament. A good man finds another good man familiar while a wicked man feels comfortable with another wicked man whose style he follows without any qualms of conscience. An example of this behavior pattern appears in what Allah says in the Qur'an: الْحَيَاتُ الْخَبِيثَاتُ (Evil women are for evil men - 24:26) and وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ (Good women are for good men - 24:26). It means that everyone strikes familiarity with a man or woman according to one's own temperament. In short, this too is a warning against falling into bad company and bad habits. One should really make an effort to abstain from these.

Verses 85 - 89

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ ۖ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾ وَلَكِنْ شِئْنَا لَنُدْهَبَنَّ بِالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ بِهِ عَلَيْنَا وَكِيلًا ﴿٨٦﴾ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۗ إِنَّ فَضْلَهُ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ كَبِيرًا ﴿٨٧﴾ قُلْ لَنْ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴿٨٨﴾ وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مِثْلٍ ۚ فَأَبَىٰ أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٨٩﴾

And they ask you about the soul. Say, "The soul is something from the command of my Lord, and you are not given but a little from the knowledge." [85]

And if We so will, We will surely take away what We have revealed to you, then you shall find no one to rely upon against Us in this matter. [86] But it is a mercy from your Lord. Great is indeed His favor upon you. [87]

Say, "If all the humans and *jinn*s join together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they shall not (be able to) come up with its like, even though they back up one another. [88]

And surely We have explained for the people in this Qur'an every subject in various ways. Still most of the people refused to do anything but reject. [89]

Commentary

The first verse (85) appearing above carries a question posed by disbelievers about Rūḥ (soul, spirit) along with its answer that came from Allah Ta'ālā. The word: *الرُّوحُ* (*al-rūḥ*) is used in the Arabic language and idiom, and in the Holy Qur'an as well, to convey several meanings. The well-recognized meaning taken from this word is common knowledge, that is, the soul on which depends life. In the Holy Qur'an, this word has also been used for the archangel, Jibra'īl al-Amin (Gabriel, the Trustworthy): *نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ* (The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down upon your heart - ash-Shu'arā' 26:193,194). It has also been used for Sayyidnā 'Isā *الطَّيِّبُ* (4:171), and Waḥy (revelation - 40:15), and the Qur'an too: *أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا* (and We have revealed to you a spirit of Our command - 42:52).

What does 'Rūḥ' signify?

Therefore, the first thing to be determined here is the intent of the questioners as to which meaning they had in mind when they had asked the question about the Rūḥ. Some respected early commentators have, in view of the context, declared this question as related to revelation and Qur'an, or to angel Jibra'īl who brought it. The apparent reason is that the Qur'an was mentioned earlier in: *وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ* (And We reveal the Qur'an - 82) and it is again the Qur'an that finds mention in the verses after that. Given this congruity, they found it appropriate to take 'Rūḥ' in this question too as signifying nothing but Waḥy and Qur'an, or Jibra'īl. In that case, the question would be about how the Waḥy or revelation came to him and who brought it. In response to the question, the Holy Qur'an considered it sufficient to say that the revelation was from

the command of Allah. It elected to be silent about its details and modalities that the questioners were seeking.

But, the background of the revelation of this verse given in authentic Aḥādīth ascending to the Holy Prophet ﷺ is just about very clear in respect of the nature of the question. Those asking the question had asked about the living Rūḥ and the underlying purpose was to find out the reality of Rūḥ. What is it? How does it come in and go out of the human body? How does it make man and animal come alive? According to the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه narrates:

'Once I was walking with the Holy Prophet ﷺ through an unpopulated part of Madīnah. He had a stick from the branch of a date palm in his blessed hand. When he passed by some Jews, they were talking among themselves: Muhammad ﷺ is coming. Ask him about the Rūḥ. Others asked them not to do that. But, those bent on asking went ahead and asked the question. After having heard the question, the Holy Prophet ﷺ reclined on his stick and stood silent which gave me the inkling that the revelation was about to come on him. After a little while, when the revelation had come to him, he recited the verse: وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ (And they ask you about the Rūḥ).'

At this point, it is understandable that it was a terminology of the Qur'an when it called the Qur'an, or Waḥy (revelation) as Rūḥ. That the question asked by these people was based on it is too far out. Of course, the matter of the living Rūḥ, human or animal, is such as would naturally emerge in everyone's mind. Therefore, the majority of commentators - Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Jarīr, al-Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān, 'Alūsī - confirm the view that the question related to the reality of the living Rūḥ. As for the continuity of references to the Qur'an in the context and that the question-answer interlude about Rūḥ coming in between would be incoherent, its answer is clear. Previous verses have mentioned hostile questions asked by the disbelievers and Mushriks. Their objective thereby was to test the Holy Prophet ﷺ concerning his claim to be a messenger of Allah. This question too is a link of the same chain. Therefore, it is not incoherent. There is yet another authentic Ḥadīth reported about the background of the revelation of this verse particularly. The position being explained here has been covered there

more explicitly, that is, the purpose of the questioner was to test the authority of the Holy Prophet ﷺ as a Messenger.

Accordingly, a report of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās ؓ appearing in the Musnad of Aḥmad says that the Quraysh of Makkah who kept addressing all sorts of questions to the Holy Prophet ﷺ hit upon the idea that the Jews were learned and knew about past scriptures. Why not ask them about what to ask the Holy Prophet ﷺ and test him thereby? Therefore, they sent their men to the Jews seeking their guidance in this matter. They told them to ask about the Rūḥ. (Ibn Kathīr) Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās ؓ has also been reported to have said in his explanation of this verse that the Jews had also said while asking this question - 'you tell us how does punishment affect the Rūḥ.' By that time, nothing had been revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ about it. Therefore, he did not answer the question instantly at that time. Then, came angel Jibrā'īl with the verse: قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي (Say, "the Rūḥ is from the command of my Lord.") (Abridged from Ibn Kathīr)

The incident of the question: Did it happen in Makkah or Madīnah?

Before we resolve this aspect of the question, we have to consider the two Ḥadīth reports relating to the background of the revelation of this verse, that of Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, referred to above. Out of the two, according to the report of Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd ؓ, this incident about the question came to pass in Madīnah - and that is the reason why some commentators have declared this verse to be Madani, though a major portion of Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl (al-Isrā') is Makkī. As for the report from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, it places the incident at Makkah. In accordance with that, this verse too remains Makkī like the whole Sūrah. Therefore, Ibn Kathīr has declared this very probability to be weightier and more acceptable. And as for the report of Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd ؓ, he responds by saying that it is possible that this verse was revealed in Madīnah a second time - as a repeated revelation of many verses of the Qur'an is an accepted fact in the sight of all 'Ulamā'. And Tafsīr Maḥzarī, by declaring the report of Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd as weightier and more acceptable, has determined the incident to be that of Madīnah and the verse to be Madani. It gives two reasons for it. Firstly, this report appears in the two Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhari and Muslim and its

authority is stronger as compared to the report of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه. Secondly, in this report, Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd is a part of the incident. He is narrating an event that was his own. This makes it contrary to the report of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās where, it is obvious, he would have heard it as told by someone (because he was too young at that time to witness the occurrence).

The answer to the question asked

The Holy Qur'ān said: *قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي* (Say, "the Rūḥ is from the command of my Lord."). While explaining the answer, statements and interpretations given by commentators differ. The closest and the clearest of these is what Qādī Thanā'ullah Pānīpatī has preferred in his Tafsīr Maḥzarī. He says: Only what was necessary and what common people would understand has been told - and the full reality of Rūḥ, that the question sought, was not unfolded because it was beyond the comprehension of common people and, for that matter, nothing they needed hinged on understanding it. Here, the Holy Prophet ﷺ was asked to respond by saying that 'the Rūḥ is from the command of my Lord.' In other words, it is not like the usual created that come into existence through the dispersal of matter and procreation. In fact, it is something created directly through the command (كُنْ: *kun*: be) of Allah Ta'ālā. At least, this much of the answer makes it clear that Rūḥ cannot be taken on the analogy of common matter - which removes all those doubts that emerge as a result of trying to understand Rūḥ through the prism of materialistic inquiry. The hard truth is that this much knowledge of Rūḥ is sufficient for man. No business, religious or worldly, depends on knowing more than that. Therefore, taking that part of the question as redundant and unnecessary, it was not answered - specially when understanding its reality is something not easy even for the wisest of the wise, not to say much about the common people.

Answering every question is not necessary unless religiously advisable

Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ has deduced from this answer the ruling that it is not necessary for the Muftī and 'Ālim to answer every question and every aspect from it as posed by the questioner. Instead of doing that, the answer should be given with religious advisability kept in sight. Any answer that is above the comprehension of the addressee, or

should there be the danger of his or her falling into misunderstanding, then, such an answer should not be given. Similarly, not to be answered are questions that are unnecessary (لا يعنى : *lā ya'ni*). Yes, should there be a person who faces a situation in which he must act one way or the other and who is no 'Ālim, then, it is necessary for the Muftī and 'Ālim to give an answer in the light of his knowledge. (Jaṣṣāṣ) Imām al-Bukhārī has devoted a chapter heading in Kitāb al-'Ilm to highlight this point. He has said that a question the answer to which is likely to cause misunderstanding should not be answered.

Whether or not it is possible for anyone to have the knowledge of the reality of Rūḥ

The Holy Qur'ān has given an answer to this question in accordance with the need and comprehension of the addressee. It has not elected to unfold the reality of Rūḥ. But, it does not necessarily imply that no human being can simply understand the reality of Rūḥ and that the Holy Prophet ﷺ also did not know its reality. The truth of the matter is that this verse neither negates nor confirms it. If a prophet or messenger were to come to know its reality through Waḥy (revelation), or a Waliyy (man of Allah) through Kashf (illumination) and Ilhām (inspiration), then, it is not contrary to this verse. In fact, even if this matter is debated and investigated in terms of reason and philosophy, it would certainly be called useless and unnecessary, but it cannot be called impermissible. Therefore, many learned scholars from the early and later period of Islam have written standard books about Rūḥ. In our period, my venerated teacher, Shaykh al-Islam, Shabbīr Aḥmad Usmānī has presented this issue admirably in a small tract. Here, he has explained its reality to the measure it is possible for a common person to understand and an educated one to find sufficient enough to avoid doubts and difficulties.

An important note

At this juncture, Imām al-Baghawī has carried a detail report from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās ؓ as follows: This verse was revealed in Makkah al-Mukarramah. It happened at a time when the Quraysh chiefs of Makkah got together and talked about the problem that Muḥammad ﷺ was born amongst us and grew up into a young man. No one ever doubted his trustworthiness, honesty and truthfulness, and he was never accused by anyone of having told a lie. Yet, despite all that,

we just do not understand the claim of being a prophet he was now making. Therefore, let us do something about it, like sending our delegation to the Jewish scholars of Madīnah and get a learned opinion about him from them. So, a delegation from the Quraysh met the Jewish scholars in Madīnah. They advised: 'we tell you three things. Ask him about these three. If he answers all three, he is no prophet. Similarly, if he does not answer any of the three, he is still no prophet. And if he answers two, not answering the third, be certain that he is the prophet.'^{*} They proposed three questions: (1) Ask him about those in the past who had sought refuge in a cave to stay safe from *shirk* - because, their account is unique. (2) Ask him about the person who had traveled through the East and West of the Earth and what had happened to him. (3) Ask him about the Rūḥ (soul, spirit).

The delegation returned and posed those three questions before the Holy Prophet ﷺ. He said, 'I shall give you the answer to these tomorrow'- but, he did not say, "*Insha'Allah*" with it. The outcome was that the channel of Waḥy (revelation) remained discontinued for a few days. There are various reports that put the number of days from twelve, fifteen to forty during which it stood stopped. The Quraysh of Makkah had their opportunity to hurl taunts - 'we were promised an answer tomorrow, now so many days have passed and we have no answer!' This caused the Holy Prophet ﷺ too to become anxious. Then came angel Jibrā'īl with the verse: وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا إِلَّا أَن يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ (And never say about anything: "I will do that tomorrow," without [saying]: "*Insha'Allāh*": [If Allah wills].') - al-Kahf, 18: 23,24) and, after that, he recited the verse about the Rūḥ mentioned above. Then came the revelation of the verses relating to the people of Kahf, and the event of Dhul-Qarnain who had traveled from the East to the West which is to appear in Sūrah al-Kahf. A detailed answer has been given there by narrating the story of the people of Kahf and Dhul-Qarnain while the question concerned with the reality of the Rūḥ was not answered (which made the sign of the veracity of prophecy given by the Jews manifest). Tirmidhī has also described this event briefly. (Maḡharī)

Investigative observations on the reality of Rūḥ (soul, spirit) and

*. This detail is in accordance with Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl, p. 134, v. 4 - Muḡammad Taqī Usmānī.

Nafs (self) have appeared earlier in this volume under verse 29 of Sūrah al-Ḥijr: نَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوْحِي (I have blown into him of my spirit - 15:29). Presented with reference to Tafsīr Maẓharī, it makes the kinds of Rūḥ along with the reality of each sufficiently clear.

We can now move to verse 86: وَكَيْنُ شَيْئًا لَنُذْهِبَنَّ (And if We so will, We will surely take away...). It will be recollected that, in the previous verse (85), by giving an answer to the question about Rūḥ as true to the measure of its necessity, the underlying effort to find out the reality of the Rūḥ was blocked and it was declared that man's knowledge, no matter how much, still remains relatively insignificant in terms of the great span of the ultimate reality of things. Therefore, getting entangled with unnecessary debates and investigations is a waste of precious time. The present verse: وَكَيْنُ شَيْئًا (And if We so will) indicates that the sum total of whatever knowledge human beings have been given, even that is no private property of theirs. Allah Ta'ālā can, if He so wills, take away that too. Therefore, they should be grateful to Allah for whatever of knowledge they have and stay away from wasting time in redundant and unnecessary investigations - specially when pure investigation is just not the objective, instead, testing others or belittling them is. If one did that, it is not out of the realm of possibility that this crookedness may result in all that one has in the name of knowledge taken away in toto. The address in this verse is, though, to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, but the purpose is to really make his followers listen and get the message - when even the knowledge of the Rasūl of Allah is not within his exclusive power and control, not much can be said about others!

The subject in verse 88: قُلْ لَئِنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ (If all humans and *jinn*s join together...) appears in some other verses of the Holy Qur'ān as well. Challenging the humankind, it has been said there: If you do not take the Qur'ān to be the word of Allah, rather take it to be a word of man, then, you too are human, why would you not come up with its like? Along with that challenge, it was also said in this verse: Not the human-kind alone, you are welcome to join up with *jinn*s, but you, all combined together, will still be unable to come out with one Sūrah - even one verse - like that of the Qur'ān.

The repetition of this subject at this place may possibly be to show the futility of what the deniers of the message were trying to do. Here

they were trying to test the veracity of the mission of a prophet of Allah by asking all sorts of questions, the one about the Rūḥ being one of them. Being an exercise in futility, why would they go about digging into unnecessary issues only to determine whether or not the prophet sent to them was true? Why they would not look into the Qur'an as it is? It leaves no room for doubt in the veracity of the Holy Prophet ﷺ as prophet and messenger of Allah. The reason is simple. When the humans and *jinn*s of the whole world are incapable of producing the least like of it, what doubt could there be in that it is but the Divine Word. And once it is proved so manifestly that the Holy Qur'an is Divine Word, hardly any doubt remains in that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was a true prophet and messenger of Allah.

The last verse: وَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا (And surely We have explained - 89) tells us that the Holy Qur'an stands out as a miracle so clear that it leaves no room for any question and doubt. Still, what is happening is that people do not thank Allah for His blessings, do not even recognize the real worth of the blessing of the Qur'an and keep wandering around in error.

Verses 90 - 95

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَبُوعًا ﴿٩٠﴾ أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّحِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجَّرَ الْأَنْهَارُ خِلَلَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٩١﴾ أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسْفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قَبِيلًا ﴿٩٢﴾ أَوْ يَكُونَ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِّنْ زُخْرَفٍ أَوْ تَرْفَى فِي السَّمَاءِ ط وَكُنْ تَوْمِنَ لِرَبِّكَ حَتَّى تُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا نَّقْرُؤُهُ ط قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيْ هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٣﴾ وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ الْهُدَى إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٤﴾ قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَّمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا ﴿٩٥﴾

And they said, "We shall never believe in you unless you