

AL-RAJ'AH

By Mohammad Pakdin*

Introduction

So far, many scholars and Philosophers have tried to unveil the mystery of the Second Coming (al-raj'ah) of the deceased Imams and raised many ideas and theories pertaining to the possibility their resurrection and its nature. In the history of human beings bodily resurrection has drawn the attention of both philosophers and religious scholars. Due to its key role in proving resurrection on the Day of Judgment I intend to conduct an investigation on the reality as well as the quality of resurrection and al-raj'ah, which is an Islamic term for 'the return of the deceased'. In Christianity, resurrection refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as resurrection in the Day of Judgment. When addressing resurrection on the Day of Judgment, Christians merely recognize and discuss bodily resurrection. A cursory glance at

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Islamic resources shows that resurrection is an essential principle within the Islamic doctrine. Resurrection, in Islamic terminology, entails both the resurrection of the Day of Judgment, also known as "ma'ād", as well as the resurrection of Imams, Jesus Christ and a few other individuals prior to the Day of Judgment, which referred to as "Al-raj'ah". Shiite Scholars strongly hold the idea of resurrection of the infallible Imams and consider it as one the focal point in Shiite beliefs. Since al-raj'ah is a form of bodily resurrection that takes place in this world, I have decided to concentrate on this topic by accumulating scattered elements of the phenomenon of resurrection according to both Islamic and western Philosophy. This study takes an argumentative and expository approach. I hope we are able to take a few steps to revive the influence of religion and truth as it is incumbent upon everyone to pave the way for others to enjoy the blessings of spirituality. By the end of this paper, we shall have covered the following topics:

- Definition of al-raj'ah
- Possibility of al-raj'ah
- Nature of al-raj'ah
- Resurrection being a miracle
- Proofs for al-raj'ah in scriptures
- Arguments for and against al-raj'ah
- Examples of resurrection in history

Keywords

Al-raj'ah, the second return, the return of the deceased,

I would like to dedicate this paper to my great teacher, Dr. Legenhausen and I hope this volume is worth of his invaluable lessons.



The Meaning of Al-Raj'ah:

The commonly addressed meaning of 'al-raj'ah' is the return of man to this world after having passed away". Christianity, Judaism as well as the Sunni sect of Islam, consider al-raj'ah among the very miracles taken place in the past, vastly regardless and negligent of the natural possibility of resurrection in this world and for its specific reasons. Besides approving the occurrences of al-raj'ah throughout history, the Shiite school of thought broadens the definition of al-raj'ah and positions 'belief in al-raj'ah' among its essential principles. In accordance with Shiite teachings, al-raj'ah will take place after the major occultation of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance), which entails the return of a particular group of deceased people.

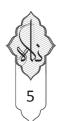
Al-raj'ah, Fact or Fiction

Traditional Proofs of Al-raj'ah:

Numerous traditions have been successively (tawātur) reported on the topic of al-raj'ah, allocating great importance to it to the extent where Shiite scholars consider it to be an essential principle. For the sake of brevity, we may simply mention a few selected traditions and quotations from great Shiite scholars.

"Indeed Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, took a compact concerning the allies to be patient in the false government. Hence, be patient and wait for your God's order. Therefore, when Imam Mahdi (p.b.u.h.) rises,

they shall say: "Who raised us from our place of sleep". This is what the All-Beneficent had promised, and the apostles had spoken the truth." (Al-Kafi: Vol. 8, p: 247)



In an authentic report narrated by Abdullah Ibn Sanān, we read, when Imam Ja'far Sadeq (a) was asked regarding the addressees of the following verse:

"Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me. And whoever is ungrateful after that it is they who are the transgressors" (Qur'an, 24:55),

he replied:

"Those are the infallible Imams (a)." (Al-Kāfī, 940) Also, Imam Sadeq (a) asserts that:

"He who does not believe in our return is not one of us." (Man Lā Yahḍuruh al-Faqīh: Vol. 3, p: 458)

Some great Shiite scholars affirmed that the authenticity of al-raj'ah is supported by many frequently narrated

١- ان الله تبارك وتعالى اخذ ميثاق اوليائنا على الصبرفى دولة الباطل، فالصبر لحكم ربك،
فلو قد قام سيد الخلق لقالوا: « ياويلنا من بعثنامن مرقدنا هذا ما وعد الرحمن وصدق المرسلون» (الكافى، ج ٨، ص ٢٤٧)
٢- «هُمُ الأئمّه» (كلينى، ج ١، ص ١٩٣)

٣- ليس منا من لم يؤمن بكرتنا" (من لا يحضره الفقيه: ج٣: ص ٤٥٨)



hadiths, which therefore makes the denial of al-raj'ah the denial of a basic Shia principle. I will further explain this belief by bringing to light a few statements from these scholars. In addition to narrating numerous traditions in reference to the event of al-raj'ah, Shaykh Ḥurr Al-'Āmulī maintains that al-raj'ah has been narrated successively and attains an amount of authenticity that no other principle or pillar does. In his valuable book, Shaykh Ṭūsī, Risālah Al-'Aqā'id al-Ja'fariyyah, points out,

"Our Prophet and our infallible Imams shall return at the time of Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) accompanied by a group of people from former and later nations to represent their governments and obtain their rights. This is a fact confirmed by numerous traditions, which hold consecutive and various chains of narrators." ⁴

Allāmah Muzaffar remarks upon al-raj'ah as one of the essential principles of Shiism and that, in this respect, numerous traditions with consecutive and various chains of narrators have been recorded. (Al-'Aqā'id al-Imāmīyyah, 1342)

The great scholar 'Allāmah Muhammad Ḥussayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī says in his magnificent exegesis of Al-Mīzān,

٣- « يرجع نبينا و اتمتنا المعصومون في زمان المهدى عجل الله تعالى فرجه مع جماعه من الامم السابقه واللاحقه لاظهار دولتهم وحقهم وبه قطعت المتواترات من الروايات» (رساله العقائد الجعفريه. ص ٢٥٠)

"The hadiths of Imams regarding al-raj'ah, have reached the level of successive narration in terms of meaning and unanimous content, espousing the notion of al-raj'ah has been considered as a distinctive characteristic of Shiism and their Imams. The successive transmission of these traditions cannot be invalidated under the pretext that single reports are open to doubt and question for some verses and hadiths, in this respect, are completely reliable and perfect in indication."



Proofs of Al-raj'ah in the Holy Quran

A group of verses in the Holy Qur'an verify the event of al-raj'ah and ascertain the belief in it. Among them, ayah 83 of chapter 27, which has had many traditions interpret it, might stand as the most explicit proof of al-raj'ah. Hence, as in Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī, 'Ālūsī confirms that this ayah is one of the most celebrated proofs on which Shia's arguments for al-raj'ah are based. The verse is as follows:

"The day We shall resurrect from every nation a group of those who denied Our signs, and they shall be held in check." (27:83)

The focus of Shia's argument is on the term 'Day'

ان الروايات متواترة معنى عن أئمة اهل البيت عليهم السلام حتى عُد القول بالرجعة عندالمخالفين من مختصات الشيعه و أئمتهم من لدن الصدرالأول، والتواتر لا يُبطَل بقبول آحاد الروايات للخدشه والمناقشه، على أن عدة من الايات النازلة فيها والروايات الوارده فيها تامة الدلاله، قابلة للاعتماد. (ج٢ص١٠٠)



mentioned in the ayah, which evidently cannot be the Day of Judgment, as according to ayah 18 of chapter 47, all people, with no exception, shall be resurrected while the context of the above-mentioned ayah clearly indicates that merely a group of people from every nation will be resurrected. Therefore, the mentioned "Day" cannot be the Day of Judgment and the context of this verse conforms precisely to the event of al-raj'ah. Shaykh Tusī in his renowned book, al-Tibyān as well as Tabarsī in Majma' al-Bayān and Shaykh Mufid in Al-Masā'ilal-Sarwiyyah support the same argument for al-raj'ah. In addition to the abovementioned argument, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī reviews other arguments for and against this interpretation of the ayah and points out that this ayah is reliable and convincing evidence for al-raj'ah. Moreover, the sequence of ayahs, also lends support to the view of al-raj'ah. (Al-Mīzān) Generally speaking of al-raj ah, we can find some ayahs which imply that a group of deceased individuals in the past will have a second coming to this world along with were some prophets such as Jesus and Moses and Uzair (p.b.u.t.).⁶ Some of these verses are as follows:

Moses (p.b.u.h.) and the Murdered:

"And when you killed a soul, and accused one another about it and Allah was to expose whatever you were concealing We said," Strike him with a piece of it:" thus does Allah revive the dead, and He shows you His signs so that you may apply reason." (2:72,73)

9

Jesus (p.b.u.h.):

"And (he will be) an apostle to the Children of Israel, (and he will declare,) "I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord: I will create for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by Allah's leave. And I heal the blind and the leper and I revive the dead by Allah's leave. And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful." (3:49)

Uzair (p.b.u.h.):

"Or him who came upon a township as it lay fallen on its trellises. He said," How will Allah revive this after its death?!" So Allah made him die for a hundred years, then He resurrected him. He said," How long have you remained?" Said he," I have remained a day or part of a day." He said," Rather you have remained a hundred years. Now look at your food and drink which have not rotted! Then look at your ass! (This was done) that We may make you a sign for mankind. And look at the bones, how We arrange them and then clothe them with flesh!" When it became evident to him, he said," I know that Allah has power over all things." (2:259)



Resurrection in Ancient Western Philosophy

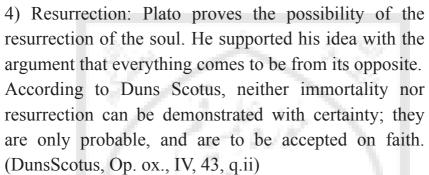
Before getting engaged in the main discussion, I initially would like to review some prominent philosophical ideas held by ancient Western philosophers. In fact, the following ideas exerted considerable influence on shaping the idea of the 'resurrection'.

"The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our own ways I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows" (Edman 1930, p. 88). These dramatic lines expressed by Socrates at the end of Plato's Apology, are engraved in the heart of Western philosophy. As a philosophical verdict on death entails a judgment on life as well, the issue of Death and life was on the top of metaphysical controversies even before the dawn of recorded history. By reviewing the history of Western philosophy it could be suggested that just a few theories dramatically influenced the course of philosophical history. These theories seem unrelated with each other at first sight but in fact consist of underlying connections;

- 1) The theory of forms by Plato: Every physical object is made up of two principal elements, which are matter and form.
- 2) The problem of universals: According to Plato, two distinct levels of reality exist, the visible world and the intelligible world of forms. For example, we can identify a beautiful painting that is visible to us and we can identify the beauty itself that is invisible.
- 3) Immortality of the soul: Socrates and Plato believed

11

in the immortality of the soul and considered the soul as the essence of a person. In his book, 'On the Soul', Aristotle proves the immortality of active intellect. Thomas Aquinas proved that the soul is incorporeal and that it can never be destroyed. (Aquinas, Thomas, Super Boetium De Trinitate)



John Wyclif did believe in resurrection and maintained: "Death is an unconscious sleep till resurrection".

Thomas Aquinas gave his strong support to the idea of Resurrection. He raised some arguments to prove resurrection.

"First of all, for the commendation of Divine Justice, to which it belongs to exalt them who humble themselves for God's sake, according to Lk. 1:52

Secondly, for our instruction in faith, since our belief in Christ's Godhead is confirmed by His rising again, according to 2 Cor. 13:4

Thirdly, for the raising of our hope, since through seeing Christ, who is our head, rise again, we hope that we likewise shall rise again. Hence it is written (1 Corinthians 15:12)



Fourthly, to set in order the lives of the faithful: according to Rm.

Fifthly, in order to complete the work of our salvation: because, just as for this reason did He endure evil things in dying that He might deliver us from evil, so was He glorified in rising again in order to advance us towards good things; according to Rm. 4:25 " (Summa Theologica, III, Q. 53, Art. 1, p/5)

It took the towering intellect of Thomas Aguinas (1225-1274) to come to terms with the powerful system and the consequences Aristotelian Christianity of its clear-cut denial of the mind-body dualism. For Aristotle, the soul is not trapped in a body but is naturally allied with it. Although this conception makes it harder to disentangle a distinctly immortal soul from the mortal body at death, Aguinas elicits from it some support for the Christian notion of an afterlife that is, a bodily resurrection. Since the soul is united with a particular body, at death this natural unity will be restored through a physical resurrection that reunites the body and soul. Christ's own resurrection is, after all, a bodily resurrection.

The Frenchman René Descartes (1596–1650), the father of modern philosophy, provides support for belief in an afterlife.

Further, the original subtitle to Descartes's major work, the Meditations, was "In which the existence of God and the Immortality of the Soul are demonstrated." Descartes provides an argument for the immortality of the soul by suggesting a radical difference between the two substances, mind and body, such that mind is in no way dependent on the body for its existence.

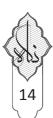


5) Reincarnation: The idea of coming back to life in a new body after death. I will reflect on this issue in the following pages.

The Possibility of the Occurrence of Al-raj'ah:

When we speak about the possibility of the occurrence of al-raj'ah we should know that the possibility of al-raj'ah as well as that of other subjects lies in the essential contingence of that particular phenomenon in and of itself. In other words, a possible thing is whose existence does not result in an impossible proposition. This point may evoke an intense debate bringing the possibility of al-raj'ah into question. In fact, this debate took place between philosophers in order to find the truth about al-raj'ah and its conditions.

However, there is a rational proposition saying that returning from actuality to factuality, i.e. potentiality is utterly impossible. In other words, every material entity consists of potentials and, by means of substantial movement, proceeds to change its potentialities to actualities. Hence, for instance, if a person achieves his perfection (acquired by changing his potentialities into



actualities) it leaves his body for an immaterial state. In accordance with what we mentioned as a rational proposition, the retrograde motion is utterly impossible, therefore that person cannot return to his initial state. Now, I would like to raise a question that occupied the minds of many philosophers and interpreters of the noble Qur'an, which is: How can we justify the occurrence of al-raj'ah, which is a return to the former potentialities while the rational proposition firmly rejects retrograde motion. In fact, some have rejected the event of al-raj'ah in the name of rationality and their accusation against Shia quickened on the pretext of respecting the rational proposition.

The great scholar Mohammad Ḥussayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who exceeded many scholars in philosophy and exegesis, quotes the same question and gives a very precious answer pertaining to the above said rational proposition. He points out that they accuse Shi'a of not following the rational proposition but nothing can be further from the truth. The validity of the rational proposition is absolutely beyond doubt but the problem lies in the fact that the proposition, which they mentioned, does not correspond to al-raj'ah. However, al-raj'ah means the return of deceased people to this world, which is possible under some particular circumstances. It is useful to know that not all people whom die achieve complete perfection and not all those that return to this world implicate the retrograde motion. In order to illuminate the point, we

should mention a few points, which are as follows:

- 1) Every external material is of two respects, namely matter and form. Matter is the source of potentiality while its form is pure actuality.
- 2) There is a substantial movement in every corporeal entity, which is the process of changing potentialities into actualities and considered a movement towards perfection.
- 3) Perfection requires the utilization of all potentialities and this happens if and only if one dies in a normal manner (as opposed to a sudden death). In fact, when someone dies, for instance, by an accident, his body lacks the ability of bearing his soul; therefore, his soul leaves the body before having the sufficient time to actualize all of his potentialities. However, in the end there are certain circumstances in the future that pave the grounds for the soul (which is pure actuality) to obtain a new body with new matter and potentiality.
- 4) Obtaining new matter is not a kind of return to the former state but rather achieving a new opportunity, new matter and proceeding with the incomplete substantial motion.

Al-raj'ah or Reincarnation

Since long ago, many Sunni scholars have accused Shi'ism of believing in reincarnation through their belief in al-raj'ah, disregarding the fact that al-raj'ah and reincarnation are two different words that have partially



overlapping meanings. For an accurate analysis, first of all, we should take a look at the meaning and the range of reincarnation. The idea of reincarnation implies that it happens when someone reaches an extent of perfection and dies, his spirit leaves his body and acquires a new body and proceeds with the second body and this process continues, most often, forever.

In her famous book, "Reincarnation, the missing link in Christianity", Elizabeth Clare says that millions of Americans and Europeans and Canadians believe in reincarnation. Many of them consider themselves as Christians, yet they persist in a belief, which the Church rejected fifteen hundred years ago. Besides, the number of believers in reincarnation among Christians is increasing and on the other hand, the number of believers in resurrection is facing a gradual downtrend. This information has a lot to say to those who are concerned and can mark a trend toward what some scholars are calling a Post-Christian religion in the west. Moreover, Elizabeth Clare remarks, "It's a shift away from traditional Church authority and toward a more personal faith based on connecting the God within".

"Heraclitus spoke of death more often than his contemporaries. For him death is a basic feature of the universe, for he believed in the periodic consumption of the universe by fire. In his cosmology, the whole world and each creature in it are in a constant state of flux, and each element lives by the death of the other. The processes

17

of life and death are a necessary feature of the world; he argues that without them the cosmos would disintegrate. Heraclitus was among the first to suggest that not all souls perish at death; virtuous souls, he believed, may rejoin the divine spark itself. Pythagoras, the philosopher and mathematician, elaborated a doctrine of reincarnation or transmigration of the soul; in his view, life and death involve a process and a progress through many series of physical forms (human and animal) with the goal of achieving a spiritual purity leading to an ultimate reunion with the state of divine origin."(Encyclopedia and Death and Dying. 2001)

Dr. Hans Tendam claims, "The source of Greek reincarnation ideas was certainly Pythagoras, not his teacher Pherecydes, not the Orphic religion, not Egypt, not the Celts, not the Thracians, and most probably not India."

If we refer to what we pointed out in the former chapter, the facts will speak for themselves. Undoubtedly, Reincarnation implicates some utterly impossible propositions, meaning that, if we assume that a spirit acquires a second body, we have no way but to admit either the unity of plurality or the conversion of potentiality into actuality while both are impossible. In other words, if the second body achieves this spirit while it has another spirit at the same time, the union of these two spirits would be the unity of plurality which is absolutely impossible and if this body does not have



any spirits it would be the conversion of the potentiality into actuality (owing to the fact that as a spirit achieves its perfection, it leaves the material body which was the source of its potentiality and, as we mentioned before, returning to the former state of potentiality is definitely impossible). However, Reincarnation is rejected in both Shi'a and Sunni teachings and believing in it is considered as the denial of the hereafter. In point of fact, there is a world of deference between reincarnation and al-raj'ah and unfortunately, lack of precision in distinguishing between them has caused a gross distortion of facts. Hence, al-raj'ah does not lead to the denial of the hereafter, the conversion of potentialities into actualities or reincarnation. At the conclusion of this discussion, I hope that this argument has helped broaden some horizons and lift the veil on the contrast between al-raj'ah and reincarnation.

The Nature of Al-raj'ah

Shiites believe that al-raj'ah shall take place after the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) and two different groups of people will be resurrected, namely pure believers and the extreme infidels. Many traditions have been narrated entailing the names and descriptions of the pure believers who will be resurrected, which may be categorized in three classes. They are as follows:

• Al-raj'ah of the holy prophet of Islam and his 'Purified

Household' (p.b.u.t.)

- Al-raj ah of other holy prophets (and the reappearance of Jesus and Khizr [p.b.u.t.])
- Al-raj'ah of a group of Shi'ites.

Some of the traditions, which affirm their return, are as follows:



According to avah 85 of chapter 28, Imam Sajjād (p.b.u.h.) states,

"Your Prophet and the Commander of Faithful and Imams shall return to you." (Tafsir Qumī)

Bākir Ibn Aa'yun quotes a hadith pertaining to the mentioned ayah from Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.):

Indeed the Messenger of Allah and Imam Ali (p.b.u.t.) shall return.⁸ (Bihār al-Anwār, Vol. 53, p.39)

Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.) explained al-raj'ah and its importance in the following sentence:

He who does not believe in our return (Al-raj'ah) is not one of us.⁹

Al-raj'ah of the Other Holy Prophets:

Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.) says,

"Allah did not send anyone including Adam and others

۷- يرجع اليكم نبيكم واميرالمومنين والائمه. (تفسيرقمي، ج ۱، ص ۱۰۶)
۸- ان رسول الله (صل الله عليه وآله) و عليا (عليه السلام) سيرجعان. (بحارالانوار، ج ۵۳،

^{9- «}ليس منا من لايومن بكرتنا»



on the mission of prophecy unless he shall return to this world and support the Commander of Faithful."¹⁰

In his exegesis of the Qur'an, the great scholar Ayyāshī quotes a hadith from Fayḍ Ibn Abī Shībah saying that, "I heard Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.) reciting the following

"I heard Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.) reciting the following ayah:

"And [recall, O People of the Scripture], when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."

And right after that, he (p.b.u.h) said,

"They will surely believe in the Messenger of Allah and will support the Commander of the Faithful." ¹¹

Therefore, Ibn Abī Shībah asks wondering how this is possible. Imam Sadeq adds that, "Yes, (all the prophets) including Adam and every other holy prophet. God Almighty didn't send them on the mission of prophecy unless they were to return to this world to fight on the side of the Commander of the Faithful."¹²

١٠- « ما بعث الله نبيا من لدن آدم فهلم جرا الا و يرجع الى الدنيا و ينصر اميرالمومنين»

١١ - (لتومنن برسول الله و لتنصرن اميرالمومنين)

۱۲ - "نعم،من آدم فهلم جرا، ولا يبعث الله و لا رسولا الا رد الى الدنيا حتى يقاتل بين يدى اميرالمومنين"

21

Al-raj'ah of Some of the Followers

In fact, the al-raj'ah of the followers is restricted to some of them and not all the followers of the Holy Prophet of Islam. Those followers whose faith reached the level of purity would have the chance of a second return to this world. Accordingly, Imam Sadeq (p.b.u.h.) explained the interpretation of ayah 83 of surah 27 which is, "The day we shall resurrect form every nation..." (27:83)¹³, and he asserts that, "All of the believers who were martyred shall definitely return (to this world) to die in a normal way and merely those who had sheer faith and those who had sheer infidelity will be returned." (Tafsir Qomi)¹⁴ Shaykh Mufīd points out that al-raj'ah, according to Shiite teachings, is just for those who are purified in their faith as well as those who are complete infidels.

Conclusion

Al-raj'ah is of is a strong and significant pillar in the Shi'ite school of thought. Believing in the al-raj'ah of the Imams and a particular group of individuals is considered as one of its essential principles. In accordance with many traditions and ayahs, al-raj'ah did take place in many occasions in history and historians have reported many instances that correspond to al-raj'ah. The possibility of al-raj'ah has been put to discussion and many scholars endeavored to explain it in compliance with Islamic Philosophy. Hence, al-raj'ah, in general, is accepted in

١٣ - (يوم نحشر من كل امه فوجا...) (النمل:٨٣)

۱۴ - ليس احد من المومنين قتل الا يرجع حتى يموت، ولا يرجع الا من محض الايمان ومحض الكفر محضا (تفسيرقمي، ج٢،ص١٣١)

many religions as an undeniable fact that can provide concrete evidence for the possibility of the hereafter.



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