

ADAM'S WRONGDOING IN THE LIGHT OF THE BENEFICENT QUALITIES OF THE TREE OF ETERNITY AND MERCIFULNESS OF ALLAH

Bharat JHUNJHUNWALA,

Formerly, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru.

INDIA

Email: bharatjj@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The conventional view is that God had prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity. However, he forgot the promise and, prodded by the Satan, he ate. He thus fell and then repented his wrongdoing. In this view, Ayat 20:115: "And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination," draws attention of Prophet Mohammad to the wrongdoing of eating of the Tree mentioned in 7:22 and 20:121. This view leaves unexplained why would God, being beneficent and merciful, prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity. We provide an alternative exegesis to resolve this issue. We suggest that the earlier promise mentioned in 20:115 was that of eating of the Tree. However, Adam forgot and did not eat of it. Then, God gave him a "negative order" to prompt him to eat of it. Adam still did not eat. Then, Satan assured Eve that God actually wanted them to eat of the Tree. Thereupon Adam and Eve ate of it and their wrongdoing of not eating of the Tree earlier became apparent to them. They repented for their mistake of not-eating of the Tree and God chose Adam and guided him. Both alternatives are fraught with difficulties. The conventional alternative does not explain why Merciful God would prohibit eating of the Tree of Eternity. Our alternative is challenged by interpreting the words of God as a "negative order." There is a need to consider both alternatives dispassionately.

Keywords: Adam, Wrongdoing, Tree of Eternity, Quran, Negative Order;

INTRODUCTION

There appears to exist a consensus among scholars that God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity and Adam ate despite the prohibition.¹ This raises a number of questions. One, God had created Adam in his image² and had taught Adam names (2:31) which means Adam, the teacher of his children, had attained a sense of divinity to be able to teach the divine names to his children.³ Question arises: How could Adam—endowed with divine qualities—violate the prohibition? Two, the Tree of Eternity would prolong the life of

¹ See, for example, Mlada Mikulicova, "Adam's story in the Qur'an," *Theologica* 4:2 (2014), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290649657_Adam%27s_Story_in_the_Qur%27an/fulltext/569b020b08aeeca985a0e14d/Adams-Story-in-the-Quran.pdf; and Abd. Halim Nasution, "Quran Insight on Human Beings in the Story of Adam," *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 3:7(2020), 9.

² Sahih al-Bukhari 6227, Book 79, Hadith 1; <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6227>. Christopher Melchert approvingly quotes the reviews done by Daniel Gimaret of this Hadith to conclude that this Hadith means that God "created Adam with such traits as reason that distinguish man from the naimals" (Christopher Melchert, "God Created Adam in His Image," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13.1 (2011), 113.

³ Mohammed Rustom, "Equilibrium and Realization: William Chittick on Self and Cosmos," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25:3 (2008).



the eater. Why would God—being Mericiful—prohibit the eating of such a beneficent tree? Three, if it is contended that God wanted to test Adam, then question arises why test by prohibition of a beneficent tree? It would be more rational to prohibit some harmful substance like achohol. Four, why was Adam made a Prophet after repentance? That would mean that sinning and repenting stands on a higher pedestal than not-sinuing and act as an encouragement to sin. Thus, so interpreted, there arises a conflict between and sound belief and reason.

We make an alternative reading of the related verses to resolve this conflict. We propose that God wanted Adam to eat of the tree. Adam's sin was that he did not eat it forthwith. God forgave him for this minor sin, and made him a Prophet in the light of the major advancement made by Adam by eating of the tree. In this way we resolve the conflict between sound belief in the Quran and reason.

Method

In his seminal article Ahmad von Denffer lays out the conditions (in sequence of importance) that author of a Tafsir must fulfill:

1. Be sound in belief ('aqida).
2. Well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language.
3. Well-grounded in other sciences that are connected with the study of the Qur'an (e.g. 'ilm al-riwaya).
4. Have the ability for precise comprehension.
5. Abstain from the use of mere opinion.
6. Begin the Tafsir of the Qur'an with the Qur'an.
7. Seek guidance from the words and explanations of the Prophet.
8. Refer to the reports from the sahaba.
9. Consider the reports from the tabi'un.
10. Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.⁴

Unquestionably, "sound belief" is the first and foremost of the requirement for a tafsir. Elaborating on this point editors of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* referring to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) say, "the enemies of Muslims are not other religions, political factions, scientific advances, etc., but ignorance, poverty and disunity. Against these enemies, the Muslim should wage jihad with the weapons of knowledge, science and hard work."⁵ Thus "knowledge and science" are lifted up from No 3 to higher in the sequence. Again, Mahsheed Ansari says in the same *Journal*, "Nursi's and Iqbal's prophetologies were reconstructed with the continuing notions that had developed in the classical period, with a 'new methodology' of prominently adopting scientific and rational sciences."⁶ Following these exegetes, we walk on the two legs of "sound belief" as noted by von Denffer and "knowledge, science and hard work" as noted by Nursi and Iqbal in making the current interpretation.

An explanation is in order regarding condition No. 2, i.e., knowledge of Arabic, mentioned by von Denffer. This author does not know Arabic, however, he has consulted

⁴ Ahmad von Denffer, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, https://islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/quran/ul_imal_quran.pdf.

⁵ David R. Law, "Editor's Introduction: Said Nursi and Prophethood." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2: 2 (2017), 1-5.

⁶ Mahsheed Ansari, "Nursi And Iqbal On Mi'Rāj: The Metaphysical Dimension Of The Prophet's Ascension," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2:2 (2017), 37.



with scholars having knowledge of the Arabic language. Also, Al-Ghazali believed the Qur'an to contain hidden meanings which could be misunderstood if one relied solely on the literal Arabic. Hence, he argued, hadith is necessary to understand and explain the literal and actual meaning of the Qur'an.⁷ We shall show that our interpretation is consistent with the hadith. Further the Editors of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* say "Islamic exegetical activity is not unidirectional from the Arab world to non-Arab Muslim communities. Rather, it is a dynamic dialogue, a call and response."⁸ Our view is that the two legs of "sound belief" and "knowledge, science and hard work" compensate for knowledge of Arabic especially when consulted with scholars knowing the language.

Conditions Nos. 4 and 5 are general in nature and entirely accepted. Our interpretation is also entirely compliant with conditions Nos. 6 and 7 (the Quran and the Hadith) though it challenges the understandings of the sahaba, tabi'un and eminent scholars—conditions Nos. 8, 9 and 10.

Thus, this work veers towards reason and sidelines sahaba, tabi'un eminent scholars in case of a conflict. In giving importance to reason, it falls in the category of al-ra'y which was approved by the Prophet when he sent Mu'adh bin Jabal to Yemen.⁹

We note that Tafsir al-ra'y has been declared haram on the basis of the following hadith: "From Ibn 'Abbas: Allah's messenger said: "He who says (something) concerning the Qur'an without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire."¹⁰ However, this hadith has been explained in two ways:

- That no one should say of the Qur'an what is not from the sahaba or tabi'un.
- That no one should say of the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.

We rely on the latter meaning that one should not say something about the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.

In conclusion, the present work relies heavily on reason and is consistent with the Quran and Hadith. It considers but more often does not agree with the interpretations made by the sahaba, tabi'un and eminent scholars.

1. THE EARLIER COVENANT

The conventional understanding is that Adam made the wrongdoing of eating of the Tree of Eternity in violation of the prohibition of God. We give below the conventional narrative sequentially. We shall give our understanding next. We have marked item 3 in this conventional sequence as "blank." This will be inserted in our alternative understanding.

1. God made Adam viceregent, 2:30.
2. God taught Adam names, 2:31.
3. (blank).
4. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
5. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.
6. Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Eternity, 2:36, 7:20 and 20:120.

⁷ Ali Suleiman Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018), 14.

⁸ Hakan Coruh and Peter G. Riddell. "Editors' Introduction: Tafsir in the Non-Arab Muslim World – I." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6:4 (2021), 1-3.

⁹ Mishkat al-masabih, quoted in Ali Suleiman Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018).

¹⁰ Ibn Taimiya quoted in Ali, *A Brief Introduction*.



7. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of eating of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121. The attention of Prophet Mohammad was drawn to to this wrongdoing of Adam in 20:115.
8. Adam repented for this major wrongdoing, 2:37 and 7:23.
9. God forgave and guided him, 7:24-25 and 20:122.

In our view this understanding raises the four questions noted in the Introduction: How could Adam—endowed with divine qualities—violate the prohibition? Two, why would God—being Merciful—prohibit the eating of such a beneficent tree? Three, why would God test by prohibition of a beneficent tree? Four, why was Adam made a Prophet after having sinned even though he repented?

We suggest an alternative possibility below. We have marked the differences from the conventional understanding in italics:

1. God made Adam viceregent, 2:30.
2. God taught Adam names, 2:31.
3. God made an earlier covenant with Adam of eating of the Tree of Eternity. God found not in him determination to follow this earlier covenant, 20:115.
4. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
5. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree *as a negative order to prompt him to eat of the Tree*, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.
6. Satan persuaded him and Eve to eat of the Tree, 2:36, 7:20 and 20:120. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of *not-eating* of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121.
7. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of *not eating* of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121.
8. Adam repented for this *minor* wrongdoing, 2:37 and 7:23.
9. God forgave him and guided him, 7:24-25 and 20:122.

The key differences between the two alternatives is in the understanding of two verses. First verse is 20:115: “And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.” The conventional understanding is that this Ayat draws attention of Prophet Mohammad to the earlier wrongdoing by Adam that is mentioned in 7:22 and 20:121. Our alternative understanding is that this Ayat tells of an earlier promise made by Adam himself to God.

The second verse is 2:35 repeated in 7:19 and 20:117: “And We said, ‘O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree lest you be among the wrongdoers’” (2:35). The conventional understanding is that this command was literally true. The alternative understanding is that this command was given as a “negative order” to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree.

We find that the Quran and hadith are consistent with both the possibilities. At the same time, both the understandings are fraught with difficulties. The conventional understanding raises the question that why would God prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity since He is Merciful? The alternate understanding is challenged by interpreting the words of God as a “negative order.” With this preface we present our alternative understanding and highlight the difficulties in both the understandings in the concluding section of this paper.

Sequence of Events in 2:30-31 and 20:115



We have placed 2:30 and 2:31 before 20:115 in the above sequence. This requires an explanation. We have to arrive at the sequence of events given in Suras 2, 7 and 20. The common anchor between these Suras is provided by the following two Ayats.

1. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
2. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.

The Quran gives different modules in the two Suras before these common anchors:

Sura 2: God made Adam viceregent (2:30) and God taught Adam names, (2:31).

Sura 20: God made an earlier covenant, God found in not in him determination to follow this earlier covenant (20:115).

Ayat 2:31 says that God taught names to Adam. Laleh Bakhtiar, President of the Institute of conventional Psychology and translator of the Quran, explains that by “the ‘names of everything’ we infer that it means the knowledge (*al-ilm*) of everything.”¹¹ The earlier covenant was related to the Tree of Eternity in the chronological reading proposed by us. It is obvious that Adam would have known the the name of the Tree when he made the earlier covenant in 20:115 if the covenant was related to the Tree. Thus, the events mentioned in 2:31 and earlier would have taken place before the events mentioned in 20:115. For this reason we have placed 2:31 before 20:115 above.

20:115 is a Headline or Chronological?

The next question is whether 20:115 should be read as a short headline to 20:116-121 as done in the conventional understanding; or it should be read chronologically in continuity with 20:116-121 as proposed by us. The first argument in favour of the conventional view is that the word “*walaqad*” in 20:115 is often used to denote a headline as done in 11:25 and 14:5. However, it is also used to stress a point without acting as a headline as in 17:70 and 54:32. Hence the use of the word “*walaqad*” in 20:115 only denotes the possibility of it being a headline. Its is also consistent with a chronological reading.

The second argument in favour of the conventional view is that the chronology of events is often reversed in the Ayats. For example, 2:67-87 tells of sacrificing a cow before the demand to see God face-to-face; while 4:153 tells of seeing God first and making the golden calf later. The implication is that the placing of 20:115 before 20:116-121 does not necessarily mean that the events described in 20:115 took place before the events described in 20:116-121. 20:115 could tell of events that took place after the events mentioned in 20:116-121. Accordingly, 20:115 could tell of telling of the wrongdoing of Adam to Prophet Mohammad long after the events mentioned in 20:116-121 took place. Once again, such reversal only denotes the possibility. The above example does not mean that every sequence of event told later in the Quran should necessarily be reversed. Therefore, the verses could also tell of events in continuity.

Past- or Future Forgetting

Even if we understand the events of 20:115 to have taken place before those of 20:117, question arises whether the terms “forgot” and “found” in 20:115 refer to the covenant that had already been made before the events of 20:115 took place; or the terms “forgot” and “found” refer to the forgetting and finding that may taken place after the events of 20:115 took place. In the former case, the term “forget” would refer to the forgetting of the earlier unspecified covenant before God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. In the latter case these terms would be understood in the future tense such

¹¹ Laleh Bakhtiar, *Quranic Psychology of the Self: A Textbook on Islamic Moral Psychology*, 2019, <https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/quranic-psychology-of-the-self-a-textbook-on-islamic-moral-psychology-ilm-an-nafs-1567446418-9781567446418.html>, 10.



as “will forget” and “will find.” Read in this way, this Ayat could tell that Adam will forget the prohibition at a later time, that is, when Satan persuaded him to eat of the Tree as suggested in the conventional understanding.

We examined the use of the word *fanasiya* used for “forgot” in 20:115:7 and its variants as given at the Quranic Arabic Corpus website. We found that 21 times it is used in the past tense and three times in the future tense. All the eight english translations on the website use past tense “forgot.”¹² We then examined the use of the word *najid*, used for “found,” in 20:115:9 and its variants. We found that 35 times it is used in the past tense and 32 times in the future tense. All the eight english translations on the website use past tense “found.”¹³

The word “forgot” is clearly used in the past tense both in usages as well as in translations. The word “found” is used equally in past- and future tense in usages but in past tense in translations. Since “forgot” is clearly used in the past tense, therefore, its conjunct “found,” we suggest, may also be read in the past tense. In view of above, we understand that the “forgetting” and “finding” would refer to the covenant that was made in the past, that is, before the subsequent command of not-eating of the Tree was made in 20:117.

Earlier Covenant: Eat of the Tree

We consider that the earlier covenant in 20:115 was made with Adam in the light of above discussion. Question still remains though what was the nature of this earlier covenant? Whether it was of “not eating” of the Tree in the conventional perspective, or it was of “eating” of the Tree in our alternative perspective? The conventional tafsirs consider this earlier covenant to be that of “not-eating” of the tree.

Qurtubi says, “Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘Ādam forgot (*nasiya*) the covenant with his Lord and so was named *insān*.’ He said, ‘Ādam forgot and so his descendants forgot.’ This is borne out in the Qur’an when God says: ‘We made a contract with Ādam before, but he forgot’ (20:115).”¹⁴

Al-Tustari says “The first instance of forgetfulness (*nisyān*) that took place in Paradise was the forgetfulness of Adam.” The commentator elaborates in a footnote: “The covenant that is being referred to here is the pact that God took from Adam in Paradise that he would not-eat of the tree, and Tustari’s words appear to be an allusion to 20:115.”¹⁵

In both the above cases, however, the reference to 20:115 is weak. In the case of al-Qurtubi it is mentioned in brackets and in the case of al-Tustari it is a comment by the commentator. Yet, most contemporary exegetes follow the conventional approach of saying that the earlier covenant was that of not-eating of the Tree.¹⁶

We find that this interpretation does not pass the test of rationality. The earlier covenant could not be of *not-eating* of the Tree because, had Adam forgot this earlier covenant and eaten of the Tree, his wrongdoing would already have become apparent to him and there would be no occasion for the wrongdoing to become apparent to him later in 20:121. Thus, we suggest that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. He did not eat of the Tree hence God “found not in him determination” as told in 20:115.

¹² Quranic Arabic Corpus, “nsy,” [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#\(20:115:7\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#(20:115:7)).

¹³ Quranic Arabic Corpus, “wjd,” [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#\(20:115:9\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#(20:115:9)).

¹⁴ Aisha Bewley, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi: Vol 1, n.d.* Bradford: Diwan Press (n.d.), 98.

¹⁵ Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler Trans, *Tafsir al-Tustari*, Louisville: Royal Aal al-Bayat Institute of Islamic Thought (2011), 17.

¹⁶ for example, Mikulicova, Adam’s story.



An unclear (*mutashaabih*) verse of the Quran has necessarily to be interpreted in light of the clear (*muhkam*) verses.¹⁷ The explanation (*ijtihad*) must be consistent with the clear verses.¹⁸ In the present case, the nature of the earlier covenant is unclear while the statement that God “found not in him determination” is clear. Hence, the earlier covenant has to be understood in a way that Adam had failed to show determination in adhering to the covenant. To this end the earlier covenant being that of the command to *eat* of the Tree would be consistent with the Ayat. Adam was commanded to eat of the Tree, he did not eat of it; he forgot and did not show determination of *eating* of the Tree. This understanding is consistent with the clear words of the Quran though it creates other problems that we shall discuss shortly.

In making this interpretation, in addition to Nursi and Iqbal, we rely Egyptian jurist Abu Ja‘far Ṭahāwī, a “flag bearer of orthodox Islam,” who says that where two interpretations of a hadith are possible, it is “probable that our Prophet sws intended one of these meanings...or our Prophet sws may have intended a meaning other than these two meanings which we have not come across yet nor has our level of knowledge reached it till now, and from God do we ask for success.”¹⁹

Revisiting the Tafsirs on the Earlier Covenant

We revisit the tafsirs by Qurtubi and Al-Tustari given previously in the light of this discussion. Qurtubi says, “Ādam forgot (*nasiya*) the covenant with his Lord... This is borne out in the Qur’an when God says: ‘We made a contract with Ādam before, but he forgot’ (20:115).” We suggest that this forgetting is amenable to both possibilities. Adam could have forgotten the earlier covenant of “eating” or “not eating.”

Al-Tustari says “The first instance of forgetfulness (*nisyan*) that took place in Paradise was the forgetfulness of Adam.” The commentator elaborates that Tustari’s words appear to be an allusion to 20:115.”²⁰ Once again, this forgetting is amenable to both possibilities. Adam could have forgotten the earlier covenant of “eating” or “not eating.”

Other commentators do not associate 20:115 with the Tree. The Shias hold that the earlier covenant was regarding Prophet Mohammad and the Imams: “God covenanted the succession of Muhammad and [the] Imams with Adam. He did not have any firm resolve for his covenant.”²¹ Another suggestion is that the earlier covenant “includes the stipulation that his [Adam’s] descendants will not serve Satan but rather serve God.”²² This is not the occasion to dwell into these understandings that are not related to the Tree. It suffices to say that these understandings do not stand against our suggestion that the earlier covenant was that of eating of the Tree.

¹⁷ Abu Zeean Afdal, “Question # 290: The Clear (al-Muhkam) and Unclear (Al-Mutashaabih) Verses of the Qur’an,” Students of Knowledge: Learn the Deen of Allah with us, Apr 2, 2018, <https://studentsofknowledge.org/question-290-the-clear-al-muhkam-and-unclear-al-mutashaabih-verses-of-the-quran/>.

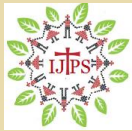
¹⁸ Hossein Atrak, “A Critical Study of Muslim Theologians’ Justifications of Adam’s Sin,” *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies*, 4:1 (2022), 41.

¹⁹ Mir Sadeq Ansari, “The Use of Historical Information in Conducting Content Criticism on Hadith,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 5:3 (2020), 40.

²⁰ Keeler, Tafsir al-Tustari, 17.

²¹ Serdar Demirel, “The impact of hadith perception on disputes between ahl al-Sunnah and al-Shi‘ah al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna ‘Ashariyyah,” *Intellectual Discourse*; Kuala Lumpur 19: 2, (2011), <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>.

²² Gordon Nickel, “Adam (Person), V. Islam,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York (2009), 322.



2. PROHIBITION AS A “NEGATIVE ORDER”

We have suggested above that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. He did not eat of the Tree. Then God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. We suggest God made this prohibition as a *negative order* to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree.

“Negative Order”: Merciful vs. Truthful

Modern psychology provides evidence of beneficial results of a negative order in certain situations. Roxanna Erickson Klein, registered nurse and licensed professional counsellor, Dallas, Texas, tells us:

...patients need hope and encouragement. Sometimes, these are more readily accepted, if negated. Negative suggestion is like “reverse psychology,” it is most effective when some part of the patient does not respond well to direction, or is overly pessimistic.²³

Sherry Buffington, Dallas based doctor of psychology and the originator of Accelerated Mind Patterning says:

The subconscious mind does not recognize negatives... So when we say “I choose not to overeat,” the subconscious sees only overeat.²⁴

In other words, if you want someone to eat, you may actually say “do not-eat.” The subconscious mind will hear it as “do eat.” Richard Campbell, author of *Dark Psychology* says:

It is often believed that the subconscious mind cannot hear negatives. Instead, any negatives communicated to the subconscious mind are interpreted as positives. For example, if you were to tell someone, do not go peeking into my room when I am away, that person is likely to interpret this subconsciously as, do go peeking into my room when I am away. This is probably the reason why there are so many exasperated parents of kids who seem to do the exact opposite of what they are told not to do.²⁵

These studies indicate that a negative order can prompt a person to act in a desired way. We may consider if God may have given such an order. An example of a similar “negative order” is available within the Quran:

And what struck you on the day the two armies met [on the day of Uhud] was by permission of God that He might make evident the [true] believers (3:166).

God knew that the Muslims would face a setback. Yet God gave them permission to march on so that “He might make evident the believers.” Similarly God may have given a “negative order” to make evident the beneficent qualities of the Tree of Eternity to Adam. Jamshed Akhtar, author of *In Search Of Our Origins: How the Quran Can Help In Scientific Research*, Practitioner of Unani Medicine M A Hashmi, and writer Shakeel Ahmad Siddiqui have said to this writer that negative order is possible. Hashmi elaborated that it was the nature of man to do what is prohibited.

Three arguments are given against the above suggestion. First argument is that God does not speak untruth. The question here is which attribute of God is to be given priority when there is an inter-se contradiction between them? The attribute of “Mercifulness” (1.2)

²³ Roxanna Erickson Klein and Dan Short, “The Form & Function of Hypnotic Suggestion,” Tokyo, 2016, <http://www.iamdrshort.com/Workshops/Tokyo%202016%20Suggestion%20II%20Form.pdf>.

²⁴ Sherry Buffington, “The 24 Unbreakable Rules of the Subconscious Mind,” <http://banishblocks.com/MBenefits/The24UnbreakableRulesoftheSubconsciousMind.pdf>, 2014.

²⁵ Richard Campbell, “Dark Psychology: Super Advanced Techniques to Persuade Anyone, Secretly Manipulate People and Influence their Behaviour without them noticing (Emotional, Body Language, NLP, Psychology Tricks),” (2019), <https://es.ilib.in/book/11235934/4843d8>.



requires that God gave a negative suggestion because that would lead Adam to eat of the tree and live a long life. On the other hand, the attribute “Affirmer of Truth” (6:62, 22:6, 23:116, 24:25, 69:23) requires that God not give the same since it would be literally untruth. We feel that the attribute of Mercifulness should be given priority since it is stated in the beginning of every chapter except one and in numerous other places of the Holy Quran; while the attribute of Truth is given only in selected Suras.

The second objection is that if the command in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117 could be read as a “negative order,” then other commands such as in 2:187, 6:151, 6:152, 17:32, 17:34, etc., must be similarly understood as negative orders. We suggest that a command has to be examined on case-by-case basis whether it would lead to Mercifulness if understood as a positive-or negative order. The principle of negative order cannot be applied indiscriminately. In the present case, the negative order was given to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree of Eternity and live a long life. Such an order would fulfil God’s Mercifulness and would be acceptable.

The third argument is regarding the interpretation of the command in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117 prohibiting Adam from eating of the Tree. This command can be interpreted either way. To give an example, the mother may say to the child “do not go out to play.” The command is clear. However, whether the mother has said this as a positive order and actually wants the child to go out and play; or she has said this as a negative order and actually wants the child to stay inside cannot be determined from a study of these words alone. The mother’s intention has to be learnt from the context. If the child was sick and the doctor had advised her not to go out and play; then the mother’s command “do not go out to play” may be understood as a positive order. If, on the other hand, the child was healthy and lazy and the doctor had advised her to go out and play; then the mother’s command “do not go out to play” may be understood as a negative order. In the present case, we understand that God wanted Adam to eat of the Tree but he was lazy hence God’s command “do not go eat of the Tree” could be a negative order.

Bidah

It can be alleged that a “negative order” is a Bidah. Generally, a Bidah is frowned upon. However, two Hadiths say:

Whosoever *introduced a beneficiary action* in Islam will be rewarded for his practice as well as for the practice of the people who follow him, without lessening their reward. Whosoever *introduced a bad practice* in Islam will take the sin for it as well as the sin of the people who follow him, without lessening their sin.²⁶

“Narrated Aisha: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, ‘If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected.’”²⁷

The Minhaj-ul-Quran website clarifies that the context in the second Hadith above was that of possible disputes between the followers of the four initial Khalifas regarding interpretations of the Quran:

O my companions, those who live after me will, very soon, see a lot of differences among you. Stick to my path and the path of the Rightly Guided Khalifas. Abstain from

²⁶ Sahih Muslim n.d. 4:1856.

²⁷ Bukhari n.d. (Narrated Aisha:Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, ‘If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected).

innovations, for every kind of innovation is a Bid'ah, and every Bid'ah is misguidance and all misguidance leads to hellfire.²⁸

In that particular situation, the Prophet said that the people should follow the Khalifas and not innovate themselves. The result is that an innovation that is consistent with the Qur'an and advances knowledge is not only acceptable but welcome as said in Sahih Muslim in the first quote above. We suggest our "innovation," if it be so termed, falls in this category since it resolves the four questions given in the introduction.

3. SATAN PERSUADED ADAM TO EAT OF THE TREE

We have suggested so far that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. Then God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree as a *negative order*.

Satan Made Apparent Their Evil of Not Eating

Adam did not-eat of the Tree even after God gave him the negative order, however. Then, in the conventional understanding:

Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of *their private parts [swathinama]*. He said, 'Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become of the immortal' (7:20).

Satan "made them *fall [fadallāhumā]* through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their *private parts [swathinama]* became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the *leaves [waraqī]* of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?" (7:22).

We consider the three words given in italics in detail.

Swathinama. It is used both in 3:20 and 7:22. The Quranic Arabic Corpus says the trilateral root "sīn wāw hamza" occurs 167 times in the Quran, in 12 derived forms. These 12 forms are given below with the meanings given in brackets:

- 30 times as the form I verb sāa (سَاءَ) (to be evil)
- five times as the form IV verb asāa (أَسَاءَ) (to do evil)
- twice as the noun aswa (أَسْوَأُ) (the worst)
- once as the noun sūa (سُوْأَى) (the evil)
- 50 times as the noun sū (سُوء) (horrible, evil, harm)
- nine times as the noun saw (سَوء) (of the evil, evil)
- five times as the noun sawāt (سَوَاءت) (their shame)
- twice as the noun sawat (سَوَاءة) (the dead body)
- four times as the nominal sayyi (سَيِّئِي) (of evil)
- 22 times as the nominal sayyi-at (سَيِّئِيَّة) (evil, misfortune, bad)
- 36 times as the noun sayyiāt (سَيِّئَات) (evil deeds, misdeeds)
- once as the form IV active participle musī (مُسِيء) (the evildoer)

The meaning in 162 of 167 usages is connected with "evil." The meaning in 5 of 167 usages is "shame." It is used as "*sawāt*" in these five usages. Thus, the first point is that the translation of "shame" as "private parts" is made by exegetes and is not given in the Quran. The second point is that, given the large number of times that "*swathinama*" is used in the sense of "evil," the usage as "*sawāt*" too may also be understood in the sense of evil or wrongdoing. It is notable that the five times it is used as *sawāt* in 7:20, 7:22, 7:26, 7:27,

²⁸ Zahid Iqbal, "The Concept of Bid'ah," Minhaj-ul-Quran, 2007, <https://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/2935/The-Concept-of-Bid-ah.html>.



20:121 are all related with the narrative of Adam. The understanding of “*swathinama*” as private parts is not attested outside the narrative of Adam in the Quran. “*Swathinama*,” therefore, may refer to the shame of wrongdoing as in a person being shamed for stealing and may not have any connection with the private parts

Fadallāhumā. This word is translated as “fall” in the above verses. The Quranic Arabic Corpus says the trilateral root “*dāl lām lām*” occurs eight times in the Quran in three usages. These usages are given below with the meanings given in brackets:

- seven times as verb *dalla* (دَلَّى), of which six times as *adullukum*, *adulluka*, *adullukum*, *nadullukum*, *dallahum*, *adullukum* (show you, direct you, guide you); and one time as *fadallāhumā* (so he made them fall).
- once as the noun *dalīl* (دَلِيل) (an indication).

In seven out of eight times the word “*fadallāhumā*” and its variants are used “to show, direct, guide, indicate” and only once as “fall.” This one usage in 7:22, therefore, could also be understood in a positive sense of guiding.

Waraqī. This word is conventionally translated as physical leaves that grow in plants. The same reference to leaves is made in 7:26:

O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you *clothing* [*libāsan*] to conceal your private parts [*swathinama*] and as adornment. But the *clothing* [*walibāsu*] of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember (7:26).

The word used for leaves-as-clothing in both instances in this Ayat are derived from the root *lām bā sīn*. In the second instance, the “*walibāsu* of righteousness” indicates that leaves-as-clothing cannot be used for physical leaves-or-clothing because the physical leaves-as-clothing does not itself have righteousness. Thus, the “*walibāsu*” or leaves-as-clothing can be used in a psychological sense, say, of “knowledge.” Thus, although not said explicitly, the word *libāsan* used in the first instance could also be understood as “knowledge.” This interpretation is supported by the mention of *libāsan* in the first instance as an “adornment.” Now, leaves that are fragile and decaying would hardly be an adornment. On the other hand, knowledge of righteousness would certainly be an adornment. We have already explained above that the word *swathinama* can be understood as “wrongdoing.” This interpretation is supported by 7:27 where it is said:

O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their *libāsahumā* to show them their *sawātihimā*... (7:27).

Here it is said that clothing *libāsahumā* was stripped to show the evil *sawātihimā*. The sequence in this Ayat is that first *libāsahumā* was stripped, then *sawātihimā* was shown. This leads to a contradiction. If *libāsahumā* is understood as physical leaves, then quite clearly, there was no clothing that could be stripped before *sawātihimā* was shown. The physical clothing was worn, if at all, after the *sawātihimā* was revealed. On the other hand if *libāsahumā* is understood as knowledge and is understood to include “false knowledge;” then it could indeed be stripped before *sawātihimā* or evil was shown. Conclusion is that leaves or *libāsan* can be understood as “knowledge.” Now, the event of covering with leaves is similar in 7:22 and 7:26-27, therefore, *waraqī* in 7:22 may be read in conjunction with *libas* in 7:26-27 and may also indicate “knowledge.”

The last point to be considered is the character of Satan. He persuaded Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree. If Satan indeed was an enemy then the eating of the Tree would be a negative event. However, we have suggested that the eating of the Tree was a positive event. Question arises how can Satan—the awowed enemy—lead to knowledge?



We see that oftentimes that actions of a bad person can lead to good results. The criminals sometimes turn approvers and help turn in their fellow criminals.²⁹ That does not mean that they are not criminals. Similarly, Satan may generally be evil but in a particular instance he may have had a positive role of “showing, directing, guiding” as indicated in the word “*fadallāhumā*” as discussed above. Allah may have warned Adam that Satan was an enemy generally and they should not befriend him on the basis of this particular exception. Accordingly we may render 7:20 and 7:22 as follows:

Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their evil [swathinama]. He said, ‘Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that [you get knowledge and you] become angels or become of the immortal (7:20).

The Satan “made them *realize their evil [fadallāhumā]* through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their *evil [swathinama]* became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the *knowledge [waraqī]* of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, “Did I not forbid you from that tree [*as a negative order*] and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy [*generally, except this particular instance*]?” (7:22).

We have undertaken exegesis of 7:20 and 7:22 above. Other Ayats relating to Adam’s wrongdoing may be understood similarly:

And We said, “O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree [*as a negative order*], lest you be among the wrongdoers” (2:35).

And Adam and his wife ate of it, and their evil [*of not-eating of the Tree earlier*] became apparent to them, and they began to fasten over themselves from the knowledge of Paradise. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and made evil [*in delaying of the eating*] (20:121).

In this way the Ayats relating to the eating of the Tree can be understood as suggested by us.

Hadiths of Eating or Not-eating of the Tree

Having shown that the Quran could indicate that God gave a negative order, we now turn to the Hadiths. The first Hadith is:

Narrated by Abu Huraira: People went to Adam to intercede for them with the Lord. “On that Adam will reply, ‘My Lord is so angry as He has never been before and will never be in future; (besides), He forbade me (to eat from) the tree, *but I disobeyed* (Him), (I am worried about) myself’ Go to somebody else; go to Noah.”³⁰

Note the words “to eat from” have been given in brackets and interpolated. It would, therefore, be equally acceptable to interpolate the words “He forbade me (*to abstain from*)” meaning thereby a positive order to eat.

This hadith is found in many versions. However, none of the versions explicitly indicate the nature of the wrongdoing done by Adam. We give below only the relevant sentence for brevity and we have given the relevant words in italics:

(Adam) will say: I am not the one, and he will mention to them and complain of *the sin* that he committed.³¹

²⁹ Tosanai Lal, “Difference between accomplice, approver and co-accused?” *Law Times Journal*, November 5, 2020, <https://lawtimesjournal.in/difference-between-accomplice-approver-and-co-accused/>.

³⁰ Bukhari 055:556.

³¹ Hadith No:4312, Narrated/Authority of Anas bin Malik, From:Sunan Ibn Majah. Chapter 40, The Chapters on Ascetism (Zuhd) <https://ahadith.co.uk/hadithnarrated.php?page=42&n=Anas+bin+Malik>.



He would say: I am not in a position to do this, and would *recall his error*, and would fight shy of his Lord on account of that; go to Noah the first messenger (after me) sent by Allah.³²

He would say: I am *not fit* to do this, but go to Ibrabim (peace be upon him) for he is the Friend of Allah.³³

And he will say: I am not in a position [to do that] - and he will *mention his wrongdoing* and will feel ashamed and will say: Go to Noah, for he is the first messenger that Allah sent to the inhabitants of the earth.³⁴

In all these versions there is no mention as to what was the sin, error or wrongdoing made by Adam. These Hadith are equally consistent with both the possibilities. Two more Hadiths refer to the unspecified error of Adam though the context is different:

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "At the end of Adam's life, when the angel of death came to him, Adam said: 'Do I not have forty years remaining?' He said: 'Did you not give them to your son Dawūd?' He said: 'Adam denied, so his offspring denied; Adam forgot, so his offspring forgot; and Adam sinned, so his offspring sinned.'"³⁵

It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira and Hudhaifa that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, would gather people. The believers would stand till the Paradise would be brought near them. They would come to Adam and say: O our father, open for us the Paradise. He would say: What turned ye out from the Paradise was the sin of your father Adam. I am not in a position to do that; better go to my son Ibrahim, the Friend of Allah.³⁶

These Hadith also do not specify whether the error of Adam was that of eating of the tree or not eating of the tree. In conclusion we submit that the Hadiths are consistent with both the possibilities and we can rely on reason to discern the nature of the error as done by us.

Companions on the Prohibition of Eating

Now we come to the sayings of the companions, successors, and scholars of subsequent generations. We rely on al-Tabri's seminal work. We find that while there is silence or lack of clarity in the Quran and the Hadiths regarding the earlier covenant, the companions are silent about the earlier covenant in 20:115 and only refer to the later prohibition made in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. Here, they always say that the prohibition was that of "not eating" of the tree and Adam sinned by eating of the same.

Ibn Humayd-Salamah-Ibn Ishaq: When God gave him a spouse and made for him a comfort (sakan) from his own person, He said to him face to face': Adam, dwell you and your spouse in Paradise! Eat freely of its plenty wherever you wish, but do not go near this tree, or you will be wrongdoers."³⁷

³² Sahih Muslim Book 1, Hadith Number 373, Sahih Muslim Book 1. Faith, Chapter :The lowest of the ranks in Paradise, <https://hadithcollection.com/sahihmuslim/sahih-muslim-book-01-faith/sahih-muslim-book-001-hadith-number-0373>.

³³ Hadith No:377, Narrated/Authority of Mabad bin Hilal al Anazi, <https://ahadith.co.uk/chapter.php?page=38&cid=6&rows=10>.

³⁴ Hadith 36, Forty Hadith Qudsi, <https://sunnah.com/qudsi40:36>.

³⁵ <https://hadeethenc.com/en/browse/hadith/10408>) Sahih/Authentic.

³⁶ Hadith No:380, From:Sahih Muslim. Chapter 1, Faith (Kitab Al Iman) <http://ahadith.co.uk/permalink-hadith-3243>

³⁷ Franz Rosenthal, General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood, Volume I, The History of al-Tabari, Albany, New York:Suny Press (1989), 274.



Musa b. Harun al-Hamdani-'Amr b. Hammad-Asbat-al Suddi-Abu Malik and Abu Salih-Ibn 'Abbas. Also (al-Suddi)-Murrah al-Hamdani-Ibn Masud and some (other) companions of the Prophet: When God said to Adam: "Dwell you and your spouse in Paradise! Eat freely of its plenty wherever you wish, but do not go near this tree, or you will be wrongdoers..."³⁸

al-Hasan b. Yahya-'Abd al-Razzaq-'Umar b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muhrib⁶⁸¹ -Wahb b. Munabbih: When God settled Adam and his spouse in Paradise, He forbade him that tree. The tree's branches were intertwined, and it bore fruit which the angels ate to live eternally. That was the fruit which God forbade Adam and his spouse to eat.³⁹

al-Qasim b. al-Hasan-al-Husayn b. Dawud Hajjaj-Abu Ma'shar-Muhammad b. Qays: God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from one tree in Paradise, but (otherwise) they could freely eat of its plenty wherever they wished.⁴⁰

We accept that our exegesis is contra that of the companions given above. However, at stake here is the resolution of the four questions given in the Introduction on the touchstone of rationality. Given that these sources are placed at sequence 8, 9 and 10 by von Denffer, we follow reason and ignore these comments. It cannot be ruled out that these interpretations may have been redacted from the Biblical tradition in later days.

Tafsirs of Eating of the Tree

Now we consider the conventional understandings of the wrongdoing of eating of the Tree mentioned in 7:22 and 20:121.

Most commentators say that the wrongdoing was of eating of the Tree. Qurtubi says, "Do not go near it to eat from it. It is said that it means 'do not touch it' or 'do not go close to it.'"⁴¹

Ibn Abbas said: "We did not find him patience in staying away from the eating from the accursed tree, and perseverance in adhering to the command."⁴²

A possible exception is Maududi who does not disclose the nature of the wrong done by Adam: "This means that he disobeyed the command because he lacked the firmness of purpose and not because of intentional rebellion. He did not say: I don't care for God. If it is His command, let it be. I will do whatever I like. Who is God to intervene in my private affairs?"⁴³

We submit that these comments require reconsideration because they do not adequately explain why Merciful God would prohibit eating of the Tree of Eternity.

Contemporary Scholars on Adam's Sin

One explanation offered is that Adam was tempted by Iblis or, alternatively, by Eve.⁴⁴ The question still remains how did Adam—endowed with reason and divine qualities—allow himself to be tempted by them?

³⁸ Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 275.

³⁹ Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 277.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 278.

⁴¹ Bewley, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 184.

⁴² Malika Khan, "People In The Quran: The Story Of Adam And Eve In The Quran," Mar 17, 2021, <https://www.getquranic.com/people-in-the-quran-the-story-of-adam-and-eve-in-the-quran/>.

⁴³ Maududi, *Tafsir on 20:115*, <https://myislam.org/surah-taha/ayat-115/>.

⁴⁴ Roohi Tahir, *Repentance, Redemption, & Salvation: An Islamic Framework*, Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, Irving, Texas, February 5, 2018, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/repentanceredemption-salvation-an-islamic-framework>; Mohammad Zarasi, "God's Seduction in Heaven and the Turning Point in Satan's Character: The Qur'anic



Seyyed Hossein Nasr says “the pact that God made with Adam refers to His telling him not to approach the tree; By aforesaid is meant either before Adam’s actual eating from the tree or, more generally, before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad ...”⁴⁵

Hossein Atrak has mentioned a number of explanations on this point among which are 1) God's prohibition was not obligatory but advisory; 2) He committed the sin out of oblivion or mistake; and 3) It was a minor transgression.⁴⁶ Once again the question remains how did Adam—endowed with reason and divine qualities—allow such a violation of advice or mistake or minor sin to happen?

Another explanation mentioned by Atrak is that Adam was not a prophet when he committed the alleged sin.⁴⁷ However, he had been—endowed with reason and divine qualities. Yet another explanation is this this sin took place in the heaven.⁴⁸ However, heaven and sin are by definition contradictory.

Yet another explanation offered is that the subsequent repentance of his transgression wiped out his sin as indicated in a Hadith: “The one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin.”⁴⁹ The first point here is that “like one who did not sin” not the same as “one who did not sin.” He is similar but not the same. Secondly, Adam would be a sinner from the time of the transgression to the time of repentance.

Perhaps the most charitable explanation was offered by poet Iqbal. He said: The purpose of the Quranic legend of the Fall is “to indicate man’s rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.”⁵⁰ Iqbal is here concerned with the positive consequences of violating the prohibition made by God. Such positive implications of the eating of the prohibited tree have been noted by other scholars as well.⁵¹ The positive implication notwithstanding these scholars accept that Adam did violate the prohibition made by God.

In the result, we find a consensus that Adam did violate the prohibition made by God in eating of the Tree. However, such a violation is incongruent with him being endowed with reason and divine qualities hence, we submit, requires reconsideration.

Other Explanations of Wrongdoing

Now we consider some other explanations of Adam’s wrongdoing.

Test. It is contended that God wanted to test Adam hence prohibited eating of the Tree. Tabari says “Now we shall discuss how God tested the obedience of our father Adam and afflicted him (for failing the test)...”⁵² Qurtubi says “What is correct is to believe that God forbade Ādam a particular tree and then he went to it and disobeyed Him by eating from it. The tree was a test.”⁵³

The Quran does not tell of the prohibition as a test. That said, the prohibition can be explained as a test in both the conventional and alternative understandings. In the

Perspective,” *Al-BayĀn – Journal of Qur’Ān and Hadīth Studies* 14 (2016), 140; Hibba Abugideiri, “Allegorical Gender: The Figure of Eve Revisited,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 13:4.

⁴⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, New York: Harper One (2015).

⁴⁶ Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

⁴⁷ Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

⁴⁸ Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

⁴⁹ Sunan Ibn Majah 4250, Book 37, Hadith 151, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4250>.

⁵⁰ M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 67–68, quoted in Muhammad Maroof Shah, *Iqbal’s Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall: A Critique*, *Intellectual Discourse*, 2009, 17: 2, 207.

⁵¹ Abugideiri, *Allegorical Gender*, 14.

⁵² Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 274-275.

⁵³ Bewley, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 186.



conventional understanding, God asked Adam not to eat of the Tree as a positive order, and he failed when he ate prompted by the Satan. In the alternative understanding, God asked Adam not to eat of the Tree as a negative order, and he failed when he did not eat until prompted by the Satan. Both views are consistent with Adam failing the test irrespective of whether the test was of eating or not-eating of the Tree.

Minor wrong. Qurtubi says that “scholars disagree about whether the Prophets can commit minor wrong actions, for which they are punished, or not, although there is a consensus that they are protected from major wrong actions and every vice in which there is disgrace or imperfection. Aṭ-Ṭabarī and other fuqahā’, mutakallimūn and hadith scholars say that minor wrong actions are possible for them, while the Shi’ites maintain that they are protected from all of that.”⁵⁴ More recently Hossein Atrak from the University of Zanjan, Iran says, “Some theologians believe that prophets are allowed to commit a minor sin both intentionally and unintentionally before being assigned as prophets and unintentionally as prophets maintain that Adam's sin was a minor sin before his prophethood.”⁵⁵ In this view, the wrong of not-eating that would be of even lesser degree than eating because not-eating does not involve any self-volition on part of the wrongdoer.

Unintentional Mistake. Mufti Muhammad Shafi writes in his tafsir on 20:115 that Adam “was overtaken forgetting and since forgetting something is beyond one's control and volition it does not constitute sin. There is a Hadith which says My followers will not be held liable for mistakes and unmindfulness.”⁵⁶ In this view, the forgetting could be either of eating or not-eating of the Tree.

Advisory Command. Atrak explains that God’s forbiddance falls in two categories:

a) God's obligatory forbidding command (*Nahye Mulawī*) refers to necessary prohibition of an act by Him without permission to do it due to its very high corruptive consequences.

b) Advisory forbidding command (*Nahye Irshādī*) which demonstrates that it is better to leave an act because of low corruption in it. Nevertheless, one is completely permitted to do it. God advises us to leave it, but He does not seriously expect us to abandon it. As a result, He neither upbraids nor punishes us for it in Doomsday.⁵⁷

Atrak holds that Adam only committed an advisory forbiddance which is not a sin or even a wrong.⁵⁸ In this view, the advisory could be of the command of either eating or not-eating of the Tree.

4. GOD CHOSE AND FORGAVE

Hereafter, the narrative is available in Suras 2, 7 and 20 in parallel. Adam asked for forgiveness (7:23; 2 and 20 are silent). This could be asking for forgiveness for eating of the Tree despite the prohibition in the conventional understanding; or asking for forgiveness for not-eating of the Tree despite having been given the negative order in the alternative understanding.

God chose and guided Adam (20:122, Suras 2 and 7 are silent). God chose and guided Adam after he asked for forgiveness for eating of the Tree despite the prohibition in the conventional understanding; or God chose and guided Adam after he asked for forgiveness

⁵⁴ Bewley, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 188.

⁵⁵ Atrak, A Critical Study, 35.

⁵⁶ Mufti Muhammad Shafi, n.d., Maarif-ul-Quran, <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>.

⁵⁷ Atrak, A Critical Study, 33.

⁵⁸ Atrak, A Critical Study, 33.



for not-eating of the Tree soon enough in the alternative understanding. Both scenarios are consistent with Adam being the first repentant⁵⁹ and that repentance wipes out past sin.⁶⁰

God directed Adam to descend as enemies (2:36, 7:24, 20:123). The “enemies” in these Ayats could refer to the animosities that may arise in the property disputes. Studies indicate that the development of agriculture was possible only if man could establish his control over the land that he cultivated. This entailed the “violence” of keeping others out of fields cultivated by oneself. Thus, anthropologists say:

(In the evolution of man) of paramount significance, is social “domestication” with new means of molding community identity and interaction, whose very essence changed; these range from bonding through kinship, exchange networks, craft specialization, feasting, and so on, to rivalry, political boundaries, and intra- and intercommunity *confrontational violence*.⁶¹

The advent of farming around 12 millennia ago was a cultural as well as technological revolution... This Holocene revolution was not sparked by a superior technology. It occurred because possession of the wealth of farmers-crops, dwellings, and animals-could be unambiguously demarcated and defended. This facilitated the spread of new property rights that were advantageous to the groups adopting them.⁶²

These observations suggest that guarding the cultivation and the animosity that it entailed was a necessary step required for the multiplication of humankind. This animosity may be mentioned in the Quran saying that God directed Adam to descend as enemies.

Adam was directed to obtain livelihood and enjoyment after descending (2:36, 7:24, 20 is silent). Among the seven translations given on Quran.com website, Sahih International, Muhammad Sarwar, Mohsin Khan and Arberry give the word “enjoyment” or “benefit;” while Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Shakir give neutral descriptions such as “condition.” Thus, the balance of evidence suggest that there was enjoyment in store for Adam on the earth. The agricultural cultivation undertaken by Adam may have provide plentiful food and enjoyment. The suggestion that Adam was to live 1000 years but the angel of death came after 960 years does not contradict the “enjoyment” that Adam had for the 960 years that he lived.⁶³

God gave Adam guidance and inspiration (2:37-38 and 20:123-125, 7 is silent). God gave Adam inspiration after he asked for forgiveness.

The narrative of Adam ends here. Question remains whether Adam was “punished” hence was in a worse situation than in Paradise; or he was better off after eating of the Tree. We once again refer to the removal of Adam from Paradise:

But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been (2:36).

As said previously, this Ayat says that Adam and Eve were in a happy state and the Satan made them slip out of it. One understanding is that this was a regressive step. They lost their happy state. Our alternative understanding is that their slipping broke the stultifying

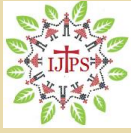
⁵⁹ Mikulicova, Adam’s story, 277.

⁶⁰ Tahir, Repentance.

⁶¹ A. Goring-Morris, Nigel and Anna Belfer-Cohen, “Neolithization Processes in the Levant: The Outer Envelope,” *Current Anthropology* 52:Supplement 4 (2011), Italics provided.

⁶² Samuel Bowles and Jung-Kyoo Choi, “Coevolution of farming and private property during the early Holocene,” in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110:22 (2013).

⁶³ Aisha Stacey, “The Story of Adam (part 1 of 5): The First Man,” IslamReligion.com, 2008, <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1190/viewall/story-of-adam/>.



primitive happiness, gave them knowledge and opened the path for them to come forth to God. Consider the following:

On the day when the earth will be changed to other than this earth and the heavens also And they will *come forth unto God*, The One The Almighty (14:48).

How can ye reject the faith in God? Seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again *to Him will ye return* (2:28)

These Ayats tell that all souls will come forth to God. Adam and Eve, however, were in a state of primitive happiness and did not make effort to “come forth” or to “return to” God. The eating of the Tree and acquisition of knowledge may be a step towards this coming forth unto God hence can be positive.

Secondly, the line of noble persons—Habil, Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa descended from Adam. Thus V. A. Mohamad Ashrof of Forum for Faith and Fraternity, Kochi says, “The tree which provides eternity suggests one’s lineage through children and generations.”

Thirdly, a Hadith says that Friday is the best day because, among others, on this day Adam was expelled from Paradise.⁶⁴ If Adam had actually done wrong then the day of punishment would not be the “best.”

It is possible, therefore, that God rewarded Adam for eating of the Tree, albeit after he made the wrongdoing of delay in doing the same, and punished him for the minor wrong of delay while rewarding him for the major march of progress that he unleashed.

CONCLUSIONS

The conventional understanding is good: God taught Adam the names of all things, He prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, Satan persuaded Eve and Adam to eat of the Tree, Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, this transgression by Adam was told to Prophet Mohammad as violation of the earlier covenant in 20:115, Adam got knowledge of righteousness, he repented, God forgave him for his transgression and they became the progenitors of Habil, Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa.

Our results show that an alternative understanding is also possible: The earlier covenant made by God with Adam was to eat of the Tree, Adam did not-eat of it, God gave him a “negative order” to prompt him to eat of it, Adam still did not-eat of the Tree, then Satan assured him that God actually wanted him to eat of the Tree, Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, they got knowledge of righteousness, they recognized their mistake of not-eating of the Tree, God forgave them for this transgression, and they became the progenitors of Habil, Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa. This alternative understanding draws support from modern psychology and anthropology and may help explain the Quranic narrative of Adam to the modern mind.

We are aware that both understandings are fraught with difficulties. The conventional understanding of God actually commanding *not-eating* of the Tree stands contra the Mercifulness of God that is a fundamental tenet of Islam. The alternative understanding that God commanding *eating* of the Tree interprets God’s prohibition of not-eating of the Tree as a negative order—which is not explicitly said in the Quran.

It is not possible to determine which of these is the true import of the Quran. Only God knows best. That said, the alternative understanding suggested by us may be considered.

⁶⁴ Muslim, Sahih, n.d. Edited by: Mika'il al-Almany, 1st edition, https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Sahih_Muslim.pdf, 4:1856.



BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] Abugideiri, Hibba, "Allegorical Gender: The Figure of Eve Revisited," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 13:4.
- [2] Afdal, Abu Zeenat, "Question # 290: The Clear (al-Muhkam) and Unclear (Al-Mutashaabih) Verses of the Qur'an," *Students of Knowledge: Learn the Deen of Allah with us*, <https://studentsofknowledge.org/question-290-the-clear-al-muhkam-and-unclear-al-mutashaabih-verses-of-the-quran/>, 2018.
- [3] Ali, Ali Suleiman, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018.
- [4] Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler Trans, *Tafsir al-Tustari*, Louisville: Royal Aal al-Bayat Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011.
- [5] Ansari, Mahsheed, "Nursi And Iqbal On Mi'Rāj: The Metaphysical Dimension Of The Prophet's Ascension," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2:2, 2017.
- [6] Ansari, Mir Sadeq, "The Use of Historical Information in Conducting Content Criticism on Hadith." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 5:3, 2020.
- [7] Atrak, Hossein, "A Critical Study of Muslim Theologians' Justifications of Adam's Sin," *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies*, 4:1, 2022.
- [8] Bakhtiar, Laleh, *Quranic Psychology of the Self: A Textbook on Islamic Moral Psychology*, 2019, <https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/quranic-psychology-of-the-self-a-textbook-on-islamic-moral-psychology-ilm-an-nafs-1567446418-9781567446418.html>.
- [9] Bewley, Aisha, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi: Vol 1, n.d.* Bradford: Diwan Press (n.d.).
- [10] Bowles, Samuel and Jung-Kyoo Choi, "Coevolution of farming and private property during the early Holocene," in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110:22, 2013.
- [11] Buffington, Sherry, "The 24 Unbreakable Rules of the Subconscious Mind," <http://banishblocks.com/MBenefits/The24UnbreakableRulesoftheSubconsciousMind.pdf>, 2014.
- [12] Campbell, Richard, "Dark Psychology: Super Advanced Techniques to Persuade Anyone, Secretly Manipulate People and Influence their Behaviour without them noticing (Emotional, Body Language, NLP, Psychology Tricks)," <https://es.1lib.in/book/11235934/4843d8>, 2019.
- [13] Coruh, Hakan and Peter G. Riddell. "Editors' Introduction: Tafsir in the Non-Arab Muslim World – I." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6:4, 2021.
- [14] Demirel, Serdar, "The impact of hadith perception on disputes between ahl al-Sunnah and al-Shi'ah al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna 'Ashariyyah," *Intellectual Discourse*; Kuala Lumpur 19: 2, <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>, 2011.
- [15] Goring-Morris, Nigel A. and Anna Belfer-Cohen, "Neolithization Processes in the Levant: The Outer Envelope," *Current Anthropology* 52: Supplement 4, 2011.
- [16] Iqbal, M., The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 67–68, quoted in Muhammad Maroof Shah, Iqbal's Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall: A Critique, *Intellectual Discourse*, 17: 2, 2009.
- [17] Iqbal, Zahid, "The Concept of Bid'ah," *Minhaj-ul-Quran*, <https://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/2935/The-Concept-of-Bid-ah.html>, 2007.
- [18] Khan, Malika, "People In The Quran: The Story Of Adam And Eve In The Quran," Mar 17, 2021, <https://www.getquranic.com/people-in-the-quran-the-story-of-adam-and-eve-in-the-quran/>.
- [19] Klein, Roxanna Erickson and Dan Short, "The Form & Function of Hypnotic Suggestion," Tokyo, <http://www.iamdrshort.com/Workshops/Tokyo%202016%20Suggestion%20II%20Form.pdf>, 2016.
- [20] Lal, Tosanai, "Difference between accomplice, approver and co-accused?" *Law Times Journal*, November 5, 2020, <https://lawtimesjournal.in/difference-between-accomplice-approver-and-co-accused/>, 2020.
- [21] Law, David R., "Editor's Introduction: Said Nursi and Prophethood." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2: 2, (2017).
- [22] Melchert, Christopher, "God Created Adam in His Image," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13.1, 2011.
- [23] Mikulicova, Mlada, "Adam's story in the Qur'an," *Theologica* 4:2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290649657_Adam%27s_Story_in_the_Qur%27an/fulltext/569b020b08aeeca985a0e14d/Adams-Story-in-the-Quran.pdf, 2014.
- [24] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The Study Quran*, New York: Harper One, 2015.
- [25] Nasution, Abd. Halim, "Quran Insight on Human Beings in the Story of Adam," *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 3:7, 2020.



- [26] Nickel, Gordon, "Adam (Person), V. Islam," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 2009.
- [27] Quranic Arabic Corpus, "nsy," [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#\(20:115:7\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#(20:115:7)).
- [28] Quranic Arabic Corpus, "wjd," [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#\(20:115:9\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#(20:115:9)).
- [29] Rosenthal, Franz, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood, Volume I, The History of al-Tabari*, Albany, New York:Suny Press, 1989.
- [30] Rustom, Mohammed, "Equilibrium and Realization:William Chittick on Self and Cosmos," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25:3, 2008.
- [31] Sahih al-Bukhari 6227, Book 79, Hadith 1; <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6227>.
- [32] Shafi, Mufti Muhammad, n.d., *Maarif-ul-Quran*, <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>.
- [33] Shah, Muhammad Maroof, Iqbal's Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall:A Critique, *Intellectual Discourse*, 17: 2, 2009.
- [34] Stacey, Aisha, "The Story of Adam (part 1 of 5):The First Man," IslamReligion.com, 2008, <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1190/viewall/story-of-adam/>.
- [35] Tahir, Roohi, Repentance, Redemption, & Salvation:An Islamic Framework, Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, Irving, Texas, February 5, 2018, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/repentanceredemption-salvation-an-islamic-framework>, 2018.
- [36] von Denffer, Ahmad, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, https://islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/quran/ul_umal_quran.pdf.
- [37] Zarasi, Mohammad, "God's Seduction in Heaven and the Turning Point in Satan's Character:The Qur'anic Perspective," *Al-BayĀn – Journal of Qur'Ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 14, 2016.