

Polygamy and Right-Hand Possession

The Deferred Abrogation.. or the Abrogation through Transformation

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تَعْدُّ الزَّوْجَاتِ وَمُلْكُ الْيَمِينِ: الْمَنْسُوخُ الْأَجَلُ أَوِ الْمَنْسُوخُ صَيْرُورَةً

Immediate Abrogation, or Explicit Abrogation:

Immediate abrogation is a prior divine decree that was abrogated by a subsequent divine decree. It is abrogated by a Quranic text. The abrogating text is explicit and direct; its existence is firmly established and clear in the Noble Book of God. As for what God Almighty caused to be forgotten, it has vanished from perception and sight. And we, humans, have no power to trace its effect. As for what the Almighty, the Omnipotent, has left for us, it remains as a lesson and evidence for those who reflect.

Deferred Abrogation, or Abrogation through Transformation:

It is a divine decree that is perpetually valid, as there is no direct abrogator for it. Its practice is permissible, but abandoning it is preferable. It is a divine permission, but it is a conditional permission. A condition that reaches the degree of miraculousness, yet it remains within the realm of possibility.

It is abrogated through transformation, for its abrogator is time and the change of circumstances. It was a necessity during the time of revelation, and it is to be forgotten in the days to come. It is the anticipated abrogation, whose abrogator is concealed within the cloak of time.

Customs are Rulers:

At the time of revelation, people were upon the morals of their fathers and grandfathers. A wide spectrum of ethical values and behavioral methods, passed down from generation to generation. Some of them had a long-established reign, thus tightening their grip on minds as well as souls. Practicing them became a source of pride, and abandoning them a sin or, at the very least, a fault.

Among them were those that aligned with noble morals, so the Holy Quran praised them and kept them as a law and statute for every resident. And among them was the insolent contradictory custom, which was fiercely and firmly opposed and abolished immediately and explicitly. And among them was the obsolete custom postponed until its term, so it was given respite after being burdened with heavy conditions.

Dislodging the people of that time, as of all times, from what they were accustomed to in terms of norms and morals is a difficult and arduous process. And on many occasions, it is fraught with danger from every direction. For customs are rulers, and liberation from their vile, shameful aspects is a struggle of the self and an act of sacrifice.

Customs are in Constant Motion:

Customs, like morals, grow upon people's psychological and physical needs. Reality is pressing, and people's needs incessantly howl in the spaces of deficiency, weakness, and desire. Feverish with the instinct for survival, man works to overcome difficulties as much as he can. He gathers the fragments of his reality. He scrutinizes his priorities, then he acts. He often succeeds, and often he fails. The act of success, like the act of failure, is a consumption of thought and energy, and a cause of worry and anxiety.

Customs do not greatly favor the timeline; they often diverge from it. For some customs adopt a descending trajectory. And to the rhythm of the evolution of man and society, their radiance dims and their effect on society and individuals lightens.

In contrast, some customs never know frailty. Once they come into existence, they fiercely colonize the fields and deeply penetrate the souls, taking possession. Thus, they become a necessity of life after having been a strange, superfluous action.

I will not delve here into the multitude of customs and collection of values of that time, but will suffice with two that throughout the ages and days have formed the axis of life and the preoccupation of legislation. I will examine the first in detail and at length as a witness to self-diminishing customs. In contrast, I will only refer to the second implicitly as one of the customs whose effect has grown with the passage of time. The first is polygamy and right-hand possession (concubinage), and the second is the drinking of wine.

Polygamy and Right-Hand Possession.. The Deferred Abrogation:

The men of that time were accustomed to multiple wives as well as mistresses. For men, by nature, still exude desire and capability. And women were in abundance, standing available. Men were few in number, fuel for war and sacrifices for ambition. And women were many, straying, filling the courtyards and squares. Their demands were low, so men gained spoils from them.

Islam came and the situation was as I have summarized. Men with numerous wives and many companions. These are inherited masculine gains through generations and generations. It is a condition too harsh for a text to tame or for a law to extinguish its embers. For the sexual instinct is ruling, and faith in the souls is still small. Islam had to approach the matter skillfully, for it is extremely delicate. It is a touch upon men's most precious stronghold.

The Deceptive Gifts

Souls are created with an innate love for meeting women. It is a meeting of necessity, as well as a meeting of desire at the same time. A truth not hidden from a Legislator who created creation and fashioned them upon their nature. But, the boundaries between necessity and desire were lost, so the flaw became a crisis of legislation.

And the problematic question remains: Is there a way to separate between the meeting of necessity and the meeting of desire? Is there a way to float the first and weigh down the second at the same time? For the first is a function of creation, and

the second is an insinuation of sin. The first is a means to preserve the species, the second is an invitation to the corruption of the species. The first is an act of strength for homelands, the second is a tool of destruction for structures. The second gives momentum to the first, without the first being a necessary condition for the second's existence.

The scale, as you see, is extremely sensitive. For an error in weighing may have unadmirable consequences. Excessive marginalization of desire may cast dark shadows over the necessity of meeting. The future of the species is what is feared for in such a situation. For a slumber of desire may be followed by the death of the entire project. No man would strive to meet a woman, and a man may not bear the consequence of this meeting. For necessity rides desire as a mount to reach the goal. And desire may sometimes become stubborn, throwing necessity to the ground, and making souls its steeds.

The Miraculous Solutions:

First: Creating a Counter Thought

Man was a prey to instinct. If it commands him, he obeys; if it violates him, he submits. It was the absolute ruler of the man of that time, with no partner to rival its reins. So, the Quran worked to break the monopoly of instinct and create a competitor for it in man's conscience. Man had experienced the consequence of instinct's singularity. And from now on, he must experience the product of a new ruling duality of higher values and instinct.

The Quran strived to intensify this competitor and that partner. It created a set of values opposed to man's unruly instinct that had broken its leash. And it expanded in explaining and encouraging those values. It sowed the counter thought to the savagery of instinct.

It trusts in the effect of thought and the power of ideas. But ideas, like trees, have time as their sun. When time grants them respite, they embrace the earth and reach for the sky. Thus, they become an intimate part of the topography of the individual as well as the collective conscience of people in every time and every place.

Second: Conditional Permission or Deferred Abrogation?

The remedy, as always, is in the garment of time. For faith was still in its infancy, small at the time of revelation. And people had spent long eras with disbelief, and their covenant with Islam was short. People smell the scent of coming change from an unknown place. They sense comfort, yet they are still without certainty. The fear of God is an act of faith, and faith is still mixed with doubt.

In this state, the Legislator cannot burden those new to faith. The target is a precious stronghold, beneath which the souls of men whose faith is not yet sound become cheap. There is no reason to wage a premature battle as long as the risks are this grave, and as long as the described action is without the stigma of crime. So, restricting the permission and burdening it with conditions was the miraculous solution until time would effect an abrogation that was timed.

Thus, God Almighty permitted polygamy, as He permitted right-hand possession. It is a permission whose condition is primarily justice. As for the ability to undertake this permission, that is another matter. For the resolve of men differs according to times and circumstances; every era has its men. So, whoever possesses the means (vitality/ability) as well as wealth, let him do so if he wishes. This is his affair, and he alone must manage the consequences as the law has decreed and outlined.

As for justice, its essence is fixed, untouched by blemish or ambiguity. Constant, it does not change with the changing seasons and passing days. Great, the titans of the earth and the stars of the sky buckle under its burden. Justice is an exclusivity of God, and an act of God. So where is man in all of this! Justice is a condition beneath which lie horrors and hardships for one who knows the meaning and descriptions of justice. With the condition of justice and the existence of capability, this permissive action becomes difficult for men, or nearly so.

Third: The Abrogation through Transformation

Time has done its work, fulfilling its vows. That which was once scattered on barren soil has now sprouted into a branch and overflowed with fragrance. It has secured for itself a lofty status in man's conscience. Instinct is no longer the sole ruler of the

man of this time. True, it has not ceased to be a fire, but it has lost its autocratic rule. It must now share the leadership of man with the new system of values.

Instinct and higher values reside in man's mind side by side. They are in direct contact, conversing at times and clashing at others. At every moment of life's distractions, friction between them is an inevitability for decision. Instinct triumphs at times, and values prevail at other times. A dialectic without respite, its outcomes shape man's conscience and the foundations of his thought. A dynamic that knows no stillness, constantly changing man's priorities as well as the form of his livelihood.

The conditions of men have changed, and thus the conditions of women have changed. The woman of this time is not the same as the woman of that time. After she was once considered merely a fertile womb or a comforting companion. She is now..., say what you will. Her veins have swelled with pride, and her ego has inflated with desire. She realized her effect on the hearts of men, so she coveted more.

Meeting her is no longer just a venture of desire or a gain of necessity alone. It is now her tool for asserting selfhood and enabling presence. Meeting her has become precious, requiring great prices and many actions. She desires, and burdens the atmosphere with her vocal wishes. As for him, he is between two agonies; either submission and thus gain, or rebellion and thus inevitable chastity. And the result as I observe it: men with much pretense and little means. And women with many demands and few sacrifices.

Time and changing circumstances have done their work on you and your imagined kingdom, O man. That time which made you a delegated master has ended. It squandered your glories, as well as your privileges, one after another. It narrowed the spaces of your garden and gave its flowers thorns and fangs. So, having one of them in your weak grasp has become a torment, so how if they gather together to punish you!

"And God knows, and you do not know" (Quran 2:216):

This is the Quranic approach when addressing important issues indicative of human actions. It begins by raising awareness through creating a counter thought to the

instinct that drives that action and that habit. Once the new ideas have settled in the collective conscience, they are followed by burdensome and restrictive conditions for the permissibility of the action. And then we are faced with one of two abrogators.

Either an immediate abrogator, direct, explicit, with no ambiguity or interpretation. Or a deferred abrogator, indirect, implicit, timed for its term. The difference in the form of abrogation is linked to the spontaneous evolution of the problematic action and the target habit.

For some actions, their suppressant is time, and their burner is the days and changing circumstances. And since the remedy is hidden in the days, there is no need, therefore, for direct confrontation with man and provoking premature battles whose consequences are not commendable. Time is given respite and left to write the ending of the story.

And for some of them, time becomes a partner of the action. It lends it strength and increases its dominance. So it prevails, and the individual as well as society become captives of this aberrant action. Then, immediate, direct abrogation becomes necessary for the safety of the individual and the protection of societies.

Confidence was lost in time and changing circumstances to extinguish people's passion and reliance on wine, for example. So the Legislator took hold of the action and arranged for its abrogation in His own way. After an introductory intellectual awareness phase, and then a conditional, temporary permission, finally came the abrogation of drinking wine directly and by an explicit Quranic text that admits no interpretation. And the verses of the Noble Remembrance with relevant indications were left standing as God wills, as evidence of a method and genius of style in managing people's affairs that which time could not resolve and whose solution was too complex for man.

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