



WATER II. WATER IN MUSLIM IRANIAN CULTURE

Water constitutes an essential element in Islamic ritual, as a means of purification, and serves as a common theme in folklore. The Qur'ān, in describing the creation of life, indicates that water is its basis: "And of water We have made everything living" (21:30); and "Allāh has created every animal of water; some of them go upon their bellies, some upon two feet, and some upon four" (24:45). Ṭabarī discusses the Koranic verse "And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was upon the water" (11:7). On the authority of many early commentators, he states that God first created water and from water created the heavens and the earth (Ṭabarī [Cairo²], I, pp. 39f.; cf. Kolīnī, *Rawżat al-kāfi*, Najaf, 1385/1965-66, pp. 80-81, 134).

A folktale tells how, when God willed the universe into being, he first created a substance which, when he looked upon it, became water, from which the heavens and the earth emerged (Ṭa'labī, *Qeşaş al-anbiā'*, Cairo, n.d., pp. 3-4, 7; Kesā'i, *Qeşaş al-anbiā'*, ed. I. Eisenberg, Leiden, 1922, pp. 6-7; Nīšābūrī, *Qeşaş al-anbiā'*, ed. Yağmā'i, Tehran, 1961, p. 3). According to tradition (*ḥadīth*), the Prophet was asked about the beginning of the creation, whereupon he replied: "God existed and there was nothing before him, his throne being on the water. He then created the heavens and the earth" (Tabrīzī, *Meškāt al-maṣābiḥ*, ed. M. Albānī, Damascus, 1961-62, III, pp. 111f.).



Water, the source of life, is indispensable for the growth of crops, and prayer for rain is well known in Islam. A tradition states that when the people complained to the Prophet of the lack of rain, he took them out to the place of prayer and prayed for rain (Tabrizī, *Meškāt* I, pp. 476-80). The bounties of rain are repeatedly stressed in the Qur'ān: "The water Allāh has sent down from the heaven whereby he has revived the earth after its death" (Qur'ān 2:164). "[He] has sent down water from the heaven, and thereby produced fruits as a provision for you" (ibid., 2:22).

Water is used for ritual purification (see Ablution [*voṣū'* and *gosl*] in Islam: "He might purify you" (Qur'ān 8:11). Purification is required before prayer, and a *ḥadīṭ* states that being purified is half of faith (Tabrizī, *Meškāt* I, p. 93). In another, the Prophet is reported as saying, "When a believer washes his face during ablution, every sin he contemplated with his eyes will come forth from his face along with the water; when he washes his hands, every sin they wrought will come forth from his hands with the water; when he washes his feet, every sin toward which his feet have walked will come out with the water, with the result that he will come forth pure from offenses" (ibid., p. 94). According to its suitability for use in ritual purification, water is of two kinds. *Mā'-e maṭlaq* ("absolute" water) is suitable, while *mā'-e moḏāf* ("solute" water, to which something has been added [*moḏāf*], such as rose water) is not. *Mā'-e moṭlaq* can be either running or standing. Running water is considered pure for ritual purposes unless its color, taste, or smell indicates the presence of impurities. Standing water in ponds or reservoirs whose capacity exceeds a certain limit (one *ḳorr*, or about 350 liters) is the equivalent of running water. Water in a vessel or container is polluted by admixtures. Well water, a kind of standing water, is considered pure unless obviously polluted (Ṭūsī, *al-Nehāya*, Beirut, 1970, pp. 2-5; idem., *Tahdīb al-aḥkām*, ed. M. Ḳorāsānī, Tehran, 1959, I, pp. 214-31; Ḥillī, *Šarā'e' al-eslām*, ed. 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn, Naḵaf, 1969, pp. 12-16; Qāzī No'mān, *Da'ā'em al-eslām*, ed. Fyzee, Cairo, 1963, I, pp. 111-13; Tabrizī, *Meškāt* I, pp. 148-52; Ša'rānī, *Ketāb al-mīzān*, Cairo, 1932, I, pp. 99-105; M. Maḡnīya, *al-Feqh 'alā al-maḏāheb al-ḳamsa*, Beirut, 1967, pp. 14-21). Detailed rules are prescribed for removing various kinds of impurities (Šaybānī, *Ketāb al-aṣl*, ed. Afḡānī, Hyderabad, 1966, I, pp. 78-87; Ṭūsī, *al-Nehāya*, pp. 5-9; idem., *Tahdīb al-aḥkām*, I, pp. 231-49; Ḥillī, *Šarā'e'*, pp. 13-14; Maḡnīya, *Feqh*, pp. 22-23). Rights regarding water and related matters are discussed elaborately in Islamic jurisprudence.

Revelation (*tanzīl*) is likened to "water sent down from the heaven by God":



Both are considered lifegiving (Martin Lings, “The Qoranic Symbolism of Water,” in *Studies in Comparative Religion* 23, 1968, p. 153). In the *ta’wīl* (esoteric interpretation) of the Qur’ān by the Isma‘ilis, water is a symbol of knowledge. As water is indispensable for the preservation and growth of life, knowledge is vital for the soul. As water washes away the material pollution from the body, knowledge purifies the soul from spiritual impurities (Qāzī No‘mān, *Ta’wīl al-da‘ā’em*, ed. M. A’zamī, Cairo, n.d., I, pp. 72, 105f.). This symbolic meaning of water is espoused by the Sufis and the Imamis. On the verse “He sendeth down Water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure” (Qur’ān 13:17), Ġazālī states, in comment on the text, that water is gnosis and the valleys are hearts (his *Meškāt al-anwār*, ed. ‘Afīfī, Cairo, 1964, p. 72). On the verse “If they trod the right path, We should have given them to drink of water in abundance” (Qur’ān 72:16), Māġlesī states in comment that water is knowledge (Qommī, *Safīnat al-beġār*, Naġaf, 1355/1936, II, pp. 562). Several verses of the Qur’ān and traditions of the Prophet are similarly interpreted by Māġlesī.

Muslim tradition abounds in references to Āb-e Zamzam, Āb-e Kawṭar, and Āb-e Ḥayāt. Zamzam is a sacred well near Ka’ba. It is said to have sprung miraculously for Ismael, the son of Abraham, when he was thirsty as a little child. His mother, Hagar, went seeking water but could not find it, so she went up to the hillocks al-Şafā and al-Marva, praying to God and imploring aid for Ishmael. God sent Gabriel, who with his heel hollowed out a place in the earth where water appeared. In the period of paganism, the well was filled in by Jorhomīs; then the Prophet’s grandfather ‘Abd-al-Moṭṭā’aleb was ordered by God, in a vision, to dig it out. Performance of pilgrimage rites culminates in the drinking of Zamzam water, and the pilgrims carry it home to give it to the sick (Ebn Heşām, *Sīra*, ed. M. al-Saqqā et al., Cairo, 1936, I, pp. 150f.; Ṭabarī [Cairo²], I, p. 252; *ibid.* II, p. 240; Ṭa’labī, *Qeşaş*, pp. 47-50; Kesā’ī, *Qeşaş*, pp. 142-43; Nīşābūrī, *Qeşaş*, pp. 67-68; EI², s.v. Zamzam).

Kawṭar, mentioned in the Qur’ān (108, the Sūrat al-Kawṭar), is described as a river (or water basin) in paradise intended for the Prophet and shown to him on his ascension there. This river is said to have beds of pearls and rubies and banks of gold. Its water is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey, its odor is more aromatic than musk, and its jugs are like stars in the sky. On the Day of Judgment the believers will drink from it, and one who drinks thereof shall never thirst (Ebn Heşām, *Sīra* II, pp. 34-35; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1322-30/1904-12, XXX, pp. 179-80; Ṭabresī, *Majma‘ al-bayān*, ed. Maġallātī,



Tehran, 1339 Š., V, pp. 548-49; Tabrīzī, *Meškāt* III, pp. 68f.; EI², s.v. Kawthar). The Shi'i tradition describes 'Alī (q.v.) as the *sāqī* of Ḥawẓ-e Kawṭar (Maḵlesī, *Behār al-anwār*, Tehran, n.d., VIII, pp. 16-29; *ibid.*, XXXIX, pp. 211-19).

Āb-e Ḥayāt, also called 'Ayn al-Ḥayāt or Nahr al-Ḥayāt, meaning the fountain of life, is associated with Keẓr, who is identified with the unnamed companion of Moses in the Qur'ān (18:65-82). Keẓr is the patron saint of wayfarers, appearing whenever a pious person is in need. He is immortal because he drank from the fountain of life which is hidden somewhere in the darkness (Ṭabarī, *Ta'rik* I, pp. 365f.; Ṭa'labī, *Qeşaş*, pp. 121f., pp. 205f.; Kesā'i, *Qeşaş*, pp. 230-33; Nišābūrī, *Qeşaş*, pp. 338-42; EI², s.v. al-Khaḍir).

The Shi'is, during Moḥarram, commemorate the sufferings of the Imam Ḥosayn, his children, and his followers at Karbalā, where they were martyred. In Shi'i lore, their greatest trial was thirst, because their enemies denied them water from the Euphrates (see 'Abbās b. 'Alī, below). As part of Moḥarram observances, the faithful distribute drinking water in memory of Ḥosayn's thirst. A pious act is widely observed in Islamic countries is the foundation of *saqqākhānas* (q.v.), or public drinking fountains, again to commemorate the events at Karbalā. The Persian language is rich in proverbs and sayings alluding to water and the thirst of the martyrs of Karbalā.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.