

## Chapter 16: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 1)

The subject of the discussion is: Faith as the Essence of the Invitation of the Prophets (‘a). In order to clarify the subject, its importance and the pertinent discussions to be made, we shall make a short introduction:

### Introduction

The emergence of the prophets is recognized as a historical event throughout the thousands of years of human history. Of course, among them there have been false claimants to prophethood and forgers of religion who presented fake goods in this sphere and concocted “heavenly scriptures and religions.” In spite of this, among the claimants to prophethood throughout history, there have been certainly tens of thousands of worthy people who had been truly chosen for the prophethood by God the Exalted. Based on what is mentioned in the narrations of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), there were 124,000 prophets, out of whom only twenty-four are mentioned in the Holy Qur’an and an equally very few numbers are mentioned by name in the Islamic narrations. Therefore, regarding most of these divine prophets (‘a) apart from having no information about their life accounts, we do not even know their names.

Now, concerning this historical trend which had always surfaced in human life as shown by history and as authentic religious sources show, this question is posed: What is the cause of emergence of this trend and what objective had the divine prophets (‘a) been trying to attain? Had all the prophets the same axis for their invitation, or each of them had his specific aim? Have there been any comparisons and contradictions between the prophets’ objectives and promulgations for the religion?

Those who have materialistic inclinations and explain the philosophy of history based on the historical materialism have their own specific interpretation of the emergence of this historical trend. You may also remember how some Marxist groups existing in our country prior to the Revolution used to interpret the emergence of the prophets (‘a) and their call. They believed in certain stages of history, regarding

contradiction as the essence of all historical movements. Accordingly, they used to present the origin of the emergence of the prophets in the scene of history as a kind of class struggle.

However, we have to set aside this kind of sociological interpretations and philosophies of history based on materialism (Marxism) and refer to the religious sources (particularly the Qur'an and narrations explaining the Qur'anic texts) ask them to explain and interpret for us the emergence of the prophets (‘a) and specify the axis of their invitation. We will arrive at conclusions which are totally different from the ones presented by the sociologists and philosophers of history.

## **Faith as the Main Axis of the Invitation of the Prophets**

What can be inferred from the religious sources, particularly the Holy Qur'an, is that faith is the axis of the prophets' invitations. In our religious culture, the concept of faith [*iman*] and unbelief [*kufr*] has taken form. To accept the prophets' invitation is called faith, while their followers are called faithful. In Arabic literature, the word *mu'min* (faithful) is an active noun which means he who has *iman* (faith). On the contrary, those who used to oppose the prophets (‘a) and deny their invitation are called unbelievers [*kafir*]. *Kufr* means to conceal, and *kafir* is one who conceals the truth.

In a simple mathematical example, we can consider the totality of the prophets' invitations throughout a historical event in the form of “axes of peculiarities.” In this portrayal and similitude, all laws, decrees and rules that the prophets presented shall be drawn in the x-axis. The vertical axis (y-axis) is where the main axis of this totality of the laws, decrees and rules is specified. Let us identify this axis as “faith.” Thus, in short, let us consider the x-axis as the axis of teachings and the y-axis as the axis of faith. Now, let us call the positive y-axis as “faith” and the negative y-axis as “unbelief.” Those who have accepted the invitation of the prophets (‘a) and acted upon their ordinances are on the y-axis.

They have moved toward the positive direction, progressed, advanced, and attained perfection. The scale of progress of every person on this axis is actually an indication of the magnitude of his perfection, and naturally, the more a person advances on this axis, the more perfect he becomes. In other words, at the time of birth, man stands at the center of the axes of peculiarities, i.e. the zero point (the point of intersection between the x- and y-axes) while his humanness is “potential”. The grounds for growth and perfection are inherently endowed in him, but for them to blossom and put them into action depend on the will and movement of man himself. On the contrary, by utilizing the same grounds, instead of progress and perfection, he takes a descending and downfall trend and moves from the zero point toward the negative direction of the y-axis. This is a backward, inhuman and anti-perfection movement.

In this manner, we can consider a general axis called “the axis of faith and unbelief” for the invitation of all the prophets (‘a) throughout history. We call those who moved toward the positive direction of this axis as “faithful” and those who moved toward the negative direction of this axis as “unbeliever.” By utilizing the same example, we can consider stages for each of faith and unbelief. Keeping in view of the same example, it becomes clear that none of the two ascending and descending trends of man has an

end, because they are infinite; that is, in the axes of peculiarities, each of the two axes (x and y) continues up to infinite positive ( $+\infty$ ) and infinite negative ( $-\infty$ ). Thus, faith and unbelief are of different stages, and man can move in any of the two directions (ascending and descending) up to infinity.

Our claim is that the axis of invitation of all the prophets ('a) is not more than one. This axis has two directions (positive and negative) to any of which man can choose out of his own volition and freewill. Advancement along the positive direction leads to the increase in faith, while advancement along the negative direction leads to the aggravation of unbelief. All religious teachings revolve around this axis, and all other issues will be evaluated in relation to this axis and through this barometer.

## **The Correct Method of Conducting Research on this Issue**

The above claim cannot be proved through empirical science or mathematical proofs; rather, it must be sought from the religion itself, and its correctness or otherwise will become clear by referring to the religious text. One should ask the prophets ('a) who have made such an invitation does the totality of your invitations have a single axis or not? As such, examining this issue through an extra-religious outlook which has been raised by some is not a correct approach. They say, "We have to see what we need from religion and the prophets so as to be made clear what function religion and the prophets have and which need of man they should meet and to what they have made invitation." In our opinion, this subject is basically false and since we are presently not examining the authenticity or falsity of the extra-religious outlook, we shall only take a short and cursory treatment of this discussion:

Regarding any set of things, one general ruling is that if we want to know its content, we have to look inside it. If there is a set of knowledge called "physics" and you want to know what this set is all about, you have to read and study a book on physics. If you want to know what problems are dealt in the science of geometry, you have to refer to a geometry book and see its content what sections and chapters it has and consist of which subjects. In this kind of cases, without having any information about the subjects and topics dealt with in a science, we cannot just sit down in a closed room at home and prove that this science should deal with what issues and which of our needs it has to meet!

The same is true in the case of religion. Religion is a set of things and in order for us to know what subjects constituting religion and what things are expected of it, we have to refer to the content of the religion. We are not supposed to sit in an empty space and decide for ourselves what it has to deal with, with which things it has to get involved and in what issues it should not interfere! At any rate, the correct method of examining this issue is the intra-religious outlook, and even assuming that through the extra-religious outlook, it can be guessed which issues religion has to deal with, this venture beats around the bush. The certain and correct way of examining it is for us to refer to religion from within and see what issues it has dealt with.

## The Axis of the Invitation of the Prophets (‘a) from the Viewpoint of the Qur’an

The source which is credible for us and to which we have absolute certainty is the Holy Qur’an. By referring to the Qur’an, it will become clear that the main axis of the invitation of all prophets (‘a) is faith, and its opposite point is unbelief. For example, it is stated in these verses:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاحْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ مَن تَدْخُلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُ ۚ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن أَنْصَارٍ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۗ رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ

***Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellects. Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say]... ‘Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith, declaring: Have faith in your Lord! So we believed’... (3: 190–3)***

The expression of the Qur’an in this verse is *uli’l-albab*; that is, the people of intellect, wisdom and astuteness. Here, what is meant by “mind” is not that which is located inside the skull; rather, it is the opposite of empty skull; that is, those who have minds and not only mere skull without a brain. It can be deduced from this expression that from the viewpoint of the Qur’an, human beings are classified into two groups; one comprises those who are idle and brainless and in terms of humanness they have only eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Sometimes, their inner and esoteric beings are more base and abject than the animals.

The Qur’an mentions this group with the expression, ***“the worst of beasts (8:22)”*** and likens some people to a donkey (62:5) or a dog (7: 176). The second group comprises those who have minds. These people arrive at conclusions by thinking, reflection, and use of their intellects, and discern the truths, which are the very roots of religion. They then engage in litanies and open-hearted prayers, and one of their litanies is this: *“Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith.”*

The perfect manifestations of this summoner are the prophets of God: *We heard a caller from You calling, ‘Have faith in your God.’ We thus accepted this invitation.* The reason for the acceptance of invitation is mentioned in the previous verse; they reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, the divine wisdom and the purpose of creation, and the genesis and resurrection. Then, they say to God, “Now that we believe, we ask You something:

رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۗ رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ

***Our Lord, forgive us of our sins and absolve us of our misdeeds, and make us die with the pious.***

**(3: 193)**

At any rate, our concern in these verses is presently the part that says, “*Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith, declaring, ‘Have faith in your Lord!’ So we believed.*” What did those callers who had come from God for the guidance of humanity call for? What was the axis of their calls, invitations and guidance? The answer is: “*calling to faith.*” They said, “*Have faith in your Lord.*” The main axis was for you to have faith, and all other things they used to mention were branches of the same axis. The faith is the root and by setting it up, the branches and fruits will come out. What is important is the root. If the root is corrupt, there is no hope for leaves and fruits. Once the root is firm and sound, it will bear fruits for years:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ تُؤْتِي أُكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا ﴿١٩٣﴾ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

***It is like a good tree: its roots are steady and its branches are in the sky. It gives its fruit every season by the leave of its Lord. (14:24-25)***

Its fruit-bearing has no limit and it can extend toward the sky infinitely. This is the faith that grows, acquires lofty stages and stations, and shows itself in the different spheres of life. It is this faith that can play a role in the individual, familial, social, and international prosperity, and finally, in the eternal life of man. This life in the world with all its length and width, and all the importance and extensive dimensions it has is a prelude to arrive at the Hereafter, just as for the fetus to be inside the womb is a prelude to come into this world:

رَبَّنَا أَمَتْنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ وَأُحْيَيْتَنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ

***“Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life. (40: 11)”***

Man is born twice: One is at the time when he is conceived in the womb of his mother and from the stages of conception to the moment of transfer to the world. The other one is at the time when he transfers from this material world to the purgatorial world and the Hereafter. In this condition, life in the world with respect to the purgatory and the Hereafter in comparison is regarded as an embryonic period. Of course, these two embryonic stages are different from each other. The first fetus is nine months old while the second is ninety years old.

But these ninety years in the world, in comparison to the otherworldly life which is infinite, is so much shorter than the nine months a fetus spends in the mother’s womb. The other difference is that to make the first fetus is not at the disposal of man, and it is totally subservient to the external factors. Factors

such as the father's sperm, the mother's womb, nourishment, and the mother's internal conditions which are all beyond the control of man combine together to make a fetus. During the period of the second fetus, however, so many factors are in the hands of man and it is he who builds his main personality, because we regard life in the world as the embryonic stage and prelude and the main life of man is in the Hereafter, as the Qur'an says:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ ۗ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ ۗ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

***The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known! (29:64)***

In any case, what constitutes the root of our felicity and the nucleus of man's felicity in this embryonic period that must grow, mutate and form other cells, tissues and limbs is the same "faith." If man, out of his own freewill, plants the seed of faith in his heart, makes it grow, irrigates it and protects it, then he will attain eternal bliss. Therefore, one proof that the axis of invitation of all prophets (‘a) is faith is this noble verse, "We have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith." By taking a survey of the Qur'anic verses, many other testimonies can be established on this subject, such as the verses mentioning the characteristics of the righteous people and those who benefit from their lives and will be safe from perils. In all these verses, the quintessence which is always highlighted is "faith." In most cases, there is talk about "Those who have faith" and "those who do good deeds." Even if in some cases, in terms of position, the action is mentioned first, it will immediately require that this action must be accompanied by faith:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْتَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً ۗ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

***Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he (or she) be faithful, verily We shall quicken with good life. (16:97)***

## **Denial as the Prime Origin of Deviation**

The opposite of faith is "denial" [*kufr*]. The lack of faith is *kufr* and the one who does not possess faith is called *kafir* [unbeliever or denier]. The Qur'an says: Finally, the unbelievers will be wretched and misfortunate. Even if they do good deeds, these will be of no avail, because these do not stem from faith but motivated by their carnal desires and material instincts; motivated by popularity among people or at least to satisfy and please their own human emotions. Whoever does a good deed for inner happiness and sense of contentment, his reward is the same inner happiness and sense of contentment he experiences, and he cannot expect anything else from God. This is especially true if the person is basically evil and mischievous and does this good deed owing to a momentary emotional excitement

and instantaneous uproar of feelings.

As to why no deed of man in a state of *kufr* and absence of faith can give him felicity is not problematic (to discern). Let us assume that you have done a great service to a person. For example, you have spent a significant portion of your property and assets to save him from a serious ailment such that you have become poor. Now, if this person did not pay attention and was heedless of you and would not even express a lukewarm empty gratitude, and after sometime met you and said, “I do not know you at all,” what judgment would you really have regarding this person? Even if you do not express it verbally, at least you will say in your heart: “What an ungrateful man he is! He does not even deserve to be called “human” because many animals do not forget the good things and services that man gives to them.

Now, imagine a person who forgets God, and not only is he heedless of God but also he says, “I do not recognize a being called God at all.” Which God? It is the same God who has created us from nothing and endowed the entire universe and our existence. It is the same God who has placed the nutritious milk in the breasts of the mother so that the helpless baby does not remain hungry. It is He under whose blessings we live day and night. It is He who ordains that “any breath that is inhaled extends life and as it is exhaled, it enlivens the person.” Thus, there are two blessings in every breath, and thanksgiving is obligatory for every blessing:

*Whatever gratitude the hand and tongue could express must be given for the air.* [1](#)

Now, after all these compassions, blessings, graces, and generousities, should man say, “Who is God by the way?! Such a being does not exist in the external world!” What an ungrateful applause indeed! In the words of the Qur’an,

وَجَعَلُوا لَهُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ جُزْءًا ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ مُّبِينٌ

***Man is indeed a manifest ingrate. (43: 15)***

This is the gravest ingratitude a person can show. If because of the thanklessness for a kindness, you regard that person as unworthy of being called “human”, if a person shows such ingratitude to the boundless ocean of blessings, he is not worthy to be called “human.”

## **The Unbelievers from the Viewpoint of the Qur’an**

The Qur’an confirms the idea that the label “human” is not worthy for the unbelievers:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

***Indeed the worst of beasts in Allah’s sight are those who are faithless; so they will not have faith.***

(8:55)

In this verse, God refuses to use the word “human” for the unbelievers and mentions them with the expression “beast” which is even more despicable than the expression “animal.”

Therefore, the first stage in which man can be situated along the correct path of humanity and in which he can activate his talents is to pay heed to the same innate demands and values which are discerned by every person through his God-given natural disposition *fitrah* which is truth-acknowledging and grateful of the blessings and their Source. The grateful-of-the-blessings-and-their-Source *fitrah* is not only confined to man as it exists in many animals. An illustrious example of them is the dog. In this attribute, this animal has reached such a point that it becomes a symbol of truth-acknowledgment and gratitude for blessings. The dog recognizes its benefactor and has total regard for him. In front of him, it bows down and places its head and face on the ground.

If those who are not willing to admit the existence of the All-benefactor Lord neither express gratitude for His blessings nor assume any responsibility for them, such people will never have any hope for their own advancement and perfection. The one who denies the existence of his Benefactor, even if sometimes he does good deeds, it has an arrogant dimension and no effect on the essence of his being. His essence has become inhuman and filthy and such a person has killed and annihilated the spirit of humanity and spirituality in his self. Through such works, one cannot revive the dead spirit. Yes, his good deeds may have effect on him in this world and he may benefit from them:

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَلَى النَّارِ أَلْهَبْتُمْ طَيِّبَاتِكُمْ فِي حَيَاتِكُمُ الدُّنْيَا وَاسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهَا فَالْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَفْسُقُونَ

***The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, [they will be told,] ‘You have exhausted your good things in the life of the world and enjoyed them. So today you will be requited with a humiliating punishment for your acting arrogantly in the earth unduly, and because you used to transgress. (46:20)***

If he has ever done a good deed, in return of it he will receive benefit in this world, but in the Hereafter he will receive nothing but the hell, chastisement and the fire. One who believes in neither God nor the Resurrection and naturally has no hope of receiving any reward from God on the Day of Resurrection, from whom does he expect any reward?!

The Qur’an has elegant parables in this regard. For example, in *Surah al-Furqan*, we read:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ نَرَى رَبَّنَا ۚ لَقَدِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَعَتَوْا عُتُوًّا كَبِيرًا

يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيُقُولُونَ هِيَ حِجْرٌ مَّحْجُورٌ

وَقَدِمْنَا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ هَبَاءً مَنْثُورًا

***Those who do not expect to encounter Us say, ‘Why have not angels been sent down to us, or why do we not see our Lord?’ Certainly they are full of arrogance within their souls and have become terribly defiant. The day when they see the angels, there will be no good news for the guilty that day, and they will say, ‘Keep off [from paradise]!’ Then We shall attend to the works they have done and then turn them into scattered dust. (25:21-23)***

The deeds of those who are at war with their Creator are like ashes which are blown by the wind. If one stormy day, ashes are carried out by the wind, what will happen? How much will remain and what benefit can they give?

In *Surah an-Nur*, we read in this regard:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسَابَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ۗ أَوْ كظلماتٍ في بحرٍ لججٍ يغشاه موجٌ من فوقه موجٌ من فوقه سحابٌ ۗ ظلماتٌ بعضها فوق بعضٍ إذا أخرج يده لم يكد يراها ۗ وَمَنْ لَمْ يجعلِ اللهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ نُورٍ

***As for the faithless, their works are like a mirage in a plain, which the thirsty man supposes to be water. When he comes to it, he finds it to be nothing; but there he finds Allah, who will pay him his full account, and Allah is swift at reckoning. Or like the manifold darkness in a deep sea, covered by billow upon billow, overcast by clouds, manifold [layers of] darkness, one on the top of another: when he brings out his hand, he can hardly see it, and one whom Allah has not granted any light has no light. (24:39-40)***

The deeds of the unbelievers are like a mirage which appears to those who are thirsty in the desert; they think that it is a stream, pond or spring, but when they approaches it, they see that it is nothing; it is a barren and desolate desert. The unbelievers expect something from their deeds, thinking that when they are thirsty of success and prosperity, those deeds will benefit them, while it is nothing but false notion. The mirage is “*supposed to be water.*” Those who have killed the spirit of “faith” in their selves have annihilated the capability for human growth in them. No matter how much good deed they may do, it will be of no use for them:

وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ قَرَارٍ

***It is like a bad tree: uprooted from the ground, it has no stability. (14:26)***

Since the root is corrupt and not attached to anything, whatever good deed they may do will not be attached to the root to become lasting. There is no correlation between the root of *kufr* and good deeds. As such, they will not be attached to each other. Once the root conceals the truth, it is ungrateful to God and it denies the lofty human values; so, how can it see good and sublime deeds? This bond will fade and not last long.

This is contrary to the case when the root is sound. If the root is sound, there is hope for fruit and produce. *Kufr* dries up and burns the root. Once the root is dried, there is no hope. But those who have faith, even if they sometimes commit mistakes, their case is like that of pests that have affected only the branches and leaves, and by means of insecticides and proper care, it can be treated and remedied, since the root is sound. Through reformative measures, the tree can bear fruits again.

It can be inferred from this group of verses that the main criterion of human progress, advancement and perfection is faith, and on the contrary, that which burns the root of humanity and shatters everything is unbelief.

Other examples make us prove that from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the axis of the invitation of the prophets (*a*) and the main factor for the salvation and felicity of man is faith, which also has requisites that we shall deal, God willing, in the next session.

## Some Fundamental Questions on the Issue of Faith

After paying attention to the fact that the essence of the invitation of the prophets (*a*) is faith, numerous questions in this context are raised. Some of these questions are as follows: What is the definition of *iman*? What is the relationship of *iman* with love [*hubb*] and hypocrisy [*nifaq*]? What is the relation of *iman* with Islam? Is *iman* identical with Islam, or are they different from each other? If they are not identical, can Islam replace *iman* and play the same role for the felicity of man, or that Islam without *iman* has no effect on the attainment of felicity?

What is the relationship of *iman* with knowledge and learning? Is the existence of *iman* possible without any prior understanding and knowledge? Granting that knowledge and faith have a positive relationship, is it a kind of correlation in the sense that whoever has knowledge must have faith too? Is faith something more than knowledge and knowledge does not necessarily end up in faith? Is it possible for a person to have knowledge of God, the hereafter and the Resurrection and yet be an unbeliever? What is the relationship between faith and action? Can faith alone and without any action lead to the felicity of man? Is action a part of faith, or is it regarded as an affair outside of faith?

Does faith have a specific and determined degree in the sense that having or not having such degree is tantamount to *iman* or *kufr*, and that all the faithful and unbelievers are in the same degree of faith, or do *iman* and *kufr* have different levels? If they have different levels, what is the effect of each of these levels? In the philosophical parlance, does *iman* change the nature of the existence of man, or is it an

accidental affair and does not change the nature and essence of man? In other words, are the faithful and the unbeliever common as far as the human nature is concerned and only in one of the attributes that they differ from each other? If *iman* and *kufr* are only an accidental affair, they are like beautiful and ugly clothes that change the external aspect of man and have no effect on his essence and nature.

The abovementioned questions are indeed serious questions on the subject of *iman* some of which have been explicitly raised and discussed in the pertinent usual talks and writings, while some others are given less attention and not examined thoroughly. In the future sessions, we will hopefully be able to discuss the most important of them as much as time allows us.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** You pointed out in your talks that if we want to know, for example, the coverage of physics, we have to refer to physics itself, while the present discussion is what religion is supposed to deal with and with which spheres it should get involved, and not what religions deals with. As such, it seems that the answer you have given is not consistent with the question.

**Answer:** If you observe well, I pointed out in the discussion that as of the moment, I do not want to embark on the issue: regarding our expectation from religion, shall we inquire from religion or shall we prove it from beyond religion? I wanted to raise skepticism. If we accept that religion has a set of precepts and teachings and proves “beings and non-beings” as well as “musts and must-nots” and values, it follows that religion is like any other form of knowledge. In any field of knowledge (such as physics, chemistry, sociology, etc.), if you want to know what the said field of knowledge deals with, it is clear that its logical and direct way is for us to refer to its content and resources and see what it really deals with. Since religion is a set of accounts and knowledge, it is natural that the best way of discovering what it deals with is to refer to its very text and resources.

Sometimes, it is asked if we can prove outside religion that it must definitely exist and in which realm it must get involved and interfere with. The answer to this question is positive. Yes, prior to entering the realm of religious knowledge, we can prove “the need for religion” on fundamental basis. In brief, there are many subjects to which the common intellect and knowledge of man are not responsive and end up in “I do not know.” In many values, it is such that the intellect is incapable of identifying them, and its manifestation is that we can see that there are many views among different individuals and societies on the issue of values.

The intellect usually does not comprehend these affairs. For instance, whether God should be worshipped or not, and how this worship should be performed are things which the intellect is incapable of comprehending. Is the form of worship of the Muslims correct, or that of the Jews or Christians? In such cases of disputes, if we want to find a decisive answer that solves the disputes, its way is not to refer to the intellect, because we said that in these cases, the human intellects have diverse views. In such cases, there is another way; that is, to refer to the divine revelation and apostleship.

In the theological discussions and the roots of religion, we prove the need for apostleship through the same way. There, we say that since there is a set of vital and exigent issues in the life of man to which the human intellect and knowledge are irresponsive and end up in “I do not know”, it follows that God Who has created mankind must have set another way of identifying them for mankind, because if He did not allow mankind to understand them, there would be something wrong with the purpose, and that purpose behind the creation of man (proximity to God] and human perfection will not be realized.

It is at this juncture that God has given to mankind the answer to these questions through the divine revelation and apostleship. It is clear that the framework of divine revelation and apostleship is nothing but the same religion. In this manner, we can prove the essence of man’s need for religion. But for us to elaborately ascertain how many issues are incomprehensible by the common human intellect and knowledge which must be elucidated by religion is something to which we cannot get a clear answer. In order to clarify this matter, the only way is for us to refer to religion and its content in order to see which issues it has explained for us.

In short, even assuming that these issues can be established through extra-religious ways, the direct and best way is for us to refer to the content of religion as a specific field of knowledge, like any other, and identify the issues it has dealt with.

1. Golestan-e Sa’di, preface. [Trans.]

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