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# **Chapter One: Prophethood**

Section One: The Necessity of Prophethood

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# **Section One: The Necessity of Prophethood**

# **General objectives**

After studying this discourse, the students are expected:

- 1. To realize the rational necessity of prophethood;
- 2. To be acquainted with the views of philosophers and scholastic theologians about revelation; and
- 3. To understand the perspective of the Qur'an and the Sunnah regarding revelation.

#### Introduction

The issue of prophethood [nubuwwah] or apostleship [ris lah] is the subject of many pages of voluminous history books—the accounts of men who spent their lives conveying the message of God to His servants and experienced different afflictions along this way.

Here, we do not need to scan the pages of history to ascertain their existence because the signs of their existence are so obvious for us that there is no room for doubt. When our eyes are attracted to the architectural magnificence of churches or mosques, when our ears are drawn to the melodious recitation of the Qur'an or the call to prayer [adh n], and when we observe faithful men and women sincerely and

earnestly treading the path shown by the apostles of God (a), we can see within ourselves the luminous visage of the prophets (a).

By hearing the sound of the invitation of the prophets ('a, seeing their celestial countenances and observing their saintly conduct, so many men and women were attracted to and believed in them. This faith [ImIn] is based on the testimony of human nature [fiInh] which smells the familiar scent of the celestial world in the persons of the prophets ('a) and acknowledges their truthfulness or rightfulness without the need for rational investigation. However, this faith does not close the door for reflection [ta'ammul] and thinking. In fact, it opens it wide. For those who have not yet embraced the faith, thinking can be a fertile ground for the growth of the seeds of faith while for those who have faith, it serves as a means of defending the faith and nurturing and cultivating the bud of belief ['ag Idah].

This point shows that the rational study or examination of prophethood is not an indispensable condition of faith in the prophets (a) but only substantiates or supplements this faith.

As the door for thinking about prophethood is now open, questions must be given answers which the intellect or reason ['aq/] can grasp well. This is exactly the concern of this chapter, and the following questions will be addressed:

- 1. Why must there be prophets in the lives of humankind? (The necessity of prophethood)
- 2. What services and benefits have the prophets rendered to mankind? (The blessings of the prophets ('a))
- 3. How did the prophets communicate with God and receive His message? (Revelation)
- 4. How can we be certain about the truthfulness of their claims to prophethood? (Miracles)
- 5. Assuming that their presence is necessary, why has the caravan of prophethood ceased to move? (Finality of the prophethood)

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In the history of Islamic thought, the debate on the *necessity* of prophethood has delved more into answering the following question: Why must God have sent prophets to mankind? Muslim scholars have tried to explain the philosophy behind the sending down of the prophets ('a) which is related to the 'action of God'.

However, there is another question here and that is: Why should we humans pay heed and take seriously the message and invitation of the apostles ('a)?

Could we not bother to take their invitation into account and just go along our way and pass by without paying attention to them? This question (regarding the human need to follow the prophets ('a)) is of

immense importance nowadays. In Islamic philosophy and theology books, the following question is also addressed: Why should man conduct research and investigation about the prophets ('a)?

However, this question has not been dealt with at great length. Perhaps, the reason for this is that it is believed that if the philosophy behind the sending down of prophets ('a) is established, the philosophy behind the human need to follow the prophets ('a) will also be proven.

Muslim scholars have answered these questions by first dealing with God and His Action, and concluding with man and his need to follow the prophets ('a). Nowadays, however, there are some transcendent theosophers [muta'allih n] who start by studying man and his need to follow the prophets ('a), and concluding with God and His Action (sending down of the prophets ('a)). This approach is widely adopted in the Christian world but is also to some extent observed in the works of Muslim scholars.

In this book, we shall follow the dominant approach in the books of Islamic philosophy and theology. By explaining the 'Action of God' (the necessity of sending down of the prophets ('a)), we shall also establish the human need to follow the prophets ('a).

# The necessity of prophethood from the Islamic theological perspective

Scholastic theology or theology ['ilm al-kal®m or kal®m], which is one of the important branches of Islamic sciences, has a long precedence. Scholastic theologians or theologians [mutakallim®n] are those who expound religious beliefs and defend them against the misgivings and doubts expressed by others. Sometimes, these misgivings and doubts originate from outside the Islamic world. For example, whenever the principle of the existence of God or monotheism [taw®d] was under attack, all Muslim theologians would come forward to defend it. However, there have also been times when doubts or misgivings were expressed by Muslims against the beliefs of fellow Muslims, and this has led to the emergence of different groups of theologians.

In addition, theologians have also differed about the methods of defending their religious beliefs. Some of them such as the Mu'tazilites [Mu'tazilah] preferred the rational method while others such as the Ash'arites [Ash\subseteq'irah] did not much incline to rational theorization. In terms of method, the Sh\subseteq'ah\subseteq theology has many similarities to that of the Mu'tazilites but has fundamental differences with it with regard to the beliefs being defended.3

In this section, we shall use the arguments advanced by a great Shi 'ah theologian, Sayyid Murta 1.4

Through use of their intellect, human beings know that some things are good while others are bad, and to know this, they are in no need of revelation [wah $\mathbb{I}$ ]. Without citing any basis from revelation, we know that justice, honesty and trustworthiness are good and that injustice and violation of the rights of others

Human beings not only understand the goodness of justice and gratitude for the kindness and benevolence of others but also consider themselves bound to observe justice and express gratitude towards others. In other words, the intellect is not only aware that justice is good but also knows that one must behave according to justice and not oppose it. Perception of the necessity and expediency of doing an action does not necessarily mean perception of its goodness and wholesomeness. Theologians have discussed at length the rational perception of duties (rational obligation).

The emphasis on the importance of intellect in perceiving what is good or bad and identifying responsibility shows the high station of the intellect in the life of humankind. In the Islamic traditions, the intellect is described as the "inner apostle" [ras I-e b I in]. Nevertheless, such an expression should not make us negligent of its definitional scope and limitations.

Attention to the scope and limitation of the intellect and its function is the basis of the theological proof [burhtn-e kaltmt] for the necessity of prophethood. Some of its limitations are as follows:

- 1. It is true that the intellect is capable of identifying the general principles underlying good and bad actions, but it is incapable of identifying particular cases in which a person is more involved in his practical life. Whenever the rational intellect ['aql-e istidl' ] intends to identify the ruling on specific cases, it often makes mistakes. The human intellect perceives that expressing gratitude to God is both good and obligatory, but it does not know which actions express such gratitude. The intellect is conscious of the necessity of respecting the rights of others, but it does not know exactly how to respect those rights nor does it know precisely what those rights are.
- 2. No doubt, the purpose of identifying good and bad actions is for people to train themselves to do good deeds and refrain from evil deeds. The truth of the matter, however, is that just to identify the goodness of actions and to sense the rational duty to do them does not automatically turn into action. In the same manner, mere identification of wicked acts does not translate into abandonment of the same. In addition to perception of an act's goodness and the feeling of having a sense of duty, the performance of a voluntary action depends on the decision and will of a person. The nature of human will and the manner of decision–making are also completely intertwined with a person's feelings, inclinations and desires.

Many people know that it is detestable to misappropriate the property of others, but the pressure of hunger can lead them away from this natural sense of responsibility and urge them to sacrifice their will at the altar of needs and inclinations.

It is of immense importance to pay attention to the crucial role of feelings and emotions and it bespeaks of the fact that the guidance or direction of man toward perfection and deliverance does not depend solely on his intellect and reason. In fact, training or upbringing must also be given importance in such a way that feelings and emotions also assist man and not hinder him along the path of doing wholesome and righteous deeds.

The ethicists or moral teachers who reflect much on the elements of moral or righteous deeds inform us that the intellect is sometimes subdued by the desire [haw] and delegates the guidance or stewardship of the ship of humanity's existence to feelings and emotions. Worse still, apart from delegating the captainship of the ship of existence to the feelings and emotions, at times it even makes itself their slave. Ethicists call such intellect the "satanic intellect" ['aql-e shay] which indulges in trickery to satiate bestial instincts and desires. As such, if man is supposed to attain salvation by doing righteous deeds and following the dictates of his reason, his feelings and emotions must be disciplined so as to abide by the intellect, and not the other way around.

Yea, it is a reality that God has made the intellect a light to show the way leading to man's salvation, but it is also a fact that this beam does not shed light on every perspective of this way. Its brightness is not so strong that a breeze emitting from the carnal desires cannot blow it out.

Now, the following question can be raised: Does God truly intend to guide us or not? If not, why has He created the light of reason in human beings? If He does intend to guide humankind toward salvation and felicity—as He must be based on His infinite mercy—then He who knows everything, including the limitations of the "inner apostle", would certainly send assistance so as to enhance the brightness of the light as well as to make it safe from the whirlwind of whims and caprice.

If God does not want to invite people to do righteous deeds, why has He bestowed them with an intellect which urges them towards righteousness? If He wants to guide humanity towards felicity through righteous deeds, why would He not supplement or complement the intellect's invitation through revelation? If one is serious in inviting a friend and knows that by just reading an invitation the friend will not come, would he not send a representative to accompany the friend so that he would be assured of him coming?

The same is true in the case of God's invitation to do righteous deeds and worship Him ['ub®diyyah]. Out of His grace, He bestowed man with the intellect. In the same manner, out of His grace, He sent His chosen ones to affirm the intellect's invitation and assist humanity by clearly showing the different dimensions of the way to salvation. In addition, by linking righteous deeds to everlasting bliss in the hereafter and evil deeds to eternal damnation in the afterlife, humanity's feelings and emotions were resolutely set at the service of their intellects.

If a person were to truly understand that by doing righteous deeds he would attain divine proximity  $[qurb-eil \ he]$ , and that divine pleasure or satisfaction, which manifests in various forms, is the most pleasant of all things, would he not desire to perform more and more righteous deeds? Theologians call these acts of God "grace"  $[lu\ f]$  and consider them incumbent upon Him, for He does not withhold any grace that does not result in some type of harm or corruption among creation.

Therefore, the theologian's approach is essentially based on the fact that God has invited man in accordance with the invitation of the intellect to good, but that without the sending down of apostles ('a)

this invitation is less productive and imperfect. Similarly, without the sending down of revelation the light of the intellect will not be sufficiently bright. He who, out of His grace, endows humanity with the intellect also grants the religion and revelation so as to make the light of reason brilliant enough to assist the intellect against whims and caprice by linking everlasting felicity to righteous deeds. The necessity of prophethood from the Islamic philosophical perspective

Although Islamic philosophy [falsafah or <code>@ikmah]6</code> is rooted in Qur'anic wisdom and Islamic traditions, especially the sayings of Imam? 'Ale ('a), there is no doubt that its organization or systematization into an organized body of knowledge is the result of the acquaintance of Muslim scholars with Greek thoughts with the translation [into Arabic] of their works during the second and third century AH. The Islamic civilization has produced great philosophers the most prominent of whom are <code>Ferebe,8</code> Ibn <code>Sene,9</code> Shaykh al-Ishreq,10 and <code>eadr</code> ad-<code>Den</code> Shereze, well known as Mulle <code>eadre.11</code> Islamic philosophy deals not only with the common and prevailing subjects in Greek philosophy but also with subjects that are not covered by Greek philosophers. The most important of these are the issues of Resurrection [ma'ed] and prophethood [nubuwwah]. The philosophical discussion on prophethood focuses more on divine revelation, but there is also an examination of the necessity of sending prophets as the conveyers of the divine revelation. The approach which is labeled "proof of general guidance" [burhen-e hideyat-e 'emmeh] is a legacy of Muslim philosophers in this field. 12

In this section of the book, we shall present the following arguments:

1. Wherever you look at the infinite creation of God, in addition to the order of existence you can also observe a sort of open and hidden guidance and direction everywhere. The order of a being shows the organization and coordination of its different components and the absence of contradiction and conflict. However, its guidance means that God has directed it towards a certain destination. God has not created contingent beings [mawj det-e imken] just to be abandoned later. Rather, apart from designing an order or system of creation, He has provided a sort of guidance according to the natural constitution of each being:

#### "Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it." 13

God created the honeybee and then taught it a wonderful system of livelihood and attainment of perfection. If we try to liken the honeybee's system of life to a strong and organized ship, the instincts which are actually God's inspirations [ilh m] serve as the captain who will direct it toward its predefined destination:



# ﴾ وَأَوْحَى رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْل أَن اتَّخِذي مِنَ الْجِبَال بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَر وَمِمَّا يَعْرشُونَ

"And your Lord inspired the bee [saying]: 'Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect'." 14

One plants a delicate seed and after sometime it grows, becomes a tree and bears sweet and nutritious fruit. Certainly, inside the small seed are wonderful elements that remain there until it becomes a full grown tree. In every living thing, there is a sort of program that guides its life through the rocky roads of the material or natural world—which is the arena of struggle and conflict—to a certain destination.

Muslim philosophers have called this "the principle of general guidance" [all-e hidlyat-e 'Immeh].

It is said that the credibility of the above mentioned principle is not anchored in a defective inductive reasoning or limited observation, but rather on a proof that bespeaks of the existence of a motive and purpose in the creation of every creature or thing. The reason behind this is that God is All-wise and He does not do anything futile or useless:

"We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain. That is a conjecture of the faithless. So woe to the faithless on account of the Fire!"15

If God did not guide living things to their ideal destinations according to their natural constitutions, their lives would consist of aimlessness and lack of purpose, whereas futility and vainness is unbecoming of Allah.

Like other creatures, human beings are enveloped in God's mercy and guidance for there is surely a purpose in his creation:

"Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?" 16

Yes, anyone who acknowledges [the existence of] God and believes in His power and wisdom has no doubt about the soundness of the *proof of general guidance*. Is there any doubt about a principle which the Qur'an explicitly affirms?

"They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him when they said, 'Allah has not sent down anything to any human'."17

This verse bears witness to the fact that due recognition of God necessitates acknowledgment and recognition of His general guidance and direction especially His intervention in the lives of humankind.

2. Guidance is commensurate to the faculties and potentials of every being. Stones and other inanimate objects are guided according to certain mechanical laws. Having a more complex structure, the plants also have a more perfect sort of guidance, while the animals are guided by their instincts.

Among all creatures, humans occupy the highest station. Like the shell, the human being is an animal that has a precious gem within. In appearance, the human being resembles other animals, but in addition he has a divine spirit that bears a heavy burden of trust:

"When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to create a human out of dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him'."18

Like other animals, man has instinctive guidance for his physical growth and perfection and lives and develops by following that instinctive guidance.

Yet, the divine spirit on which rational human life depends has endowed man with an important advantage and that is the element of freewill or volition [ikht yr]. Unlike other animals, man is not an innate prisoner of his instincts for he can overcome their influence. He can even regulate his instincts and desires to be at the service of his intellect or reason.

Of course, such a creature requires access to a sort of guidance which is consistent with his freewill.

#### Aristotle says:

"We must not follow those who tell us that since we are humans, we must think of things human, and since we are mortals, we must engage in transient affairs. Rather, as far as possible, we must make ourselves immortal and we must try our best to live consistent with the best thing (intellect) within us." 19

Yet, how is it that we can make ourselves immortal and think of eternity? Is it possible except by way of divine revelation? In the absence of divine revelation, it is not possible to attain eternal happiness.

Of course God, who has not spared creating eyebrow and eyelash—which have lower albeit vital functions in the lives of human beings—does not also spare sending prophets in which lie the survival of

the human race and the eternal happiness of every person.20

3. It is true that the "principle of general guidance" emphasizes the guidance of humanity toward eternal salvation in the hereafter; however, since worldly life is the preliminary stage of this guidance, leadership and direction in the affairs related to life in the world are among the tasks of the prophets ('a). In this connection, it is usually emphasized that social life, which is the foundation of human civilization, is only possible under the auspices of revealed teachings. If there had been no historical record of the existence of prophets, there would also have been no trace of human civilization. Collective life is only possible with the existence of just laws and moral upbringing which in turn emanate from revealed teachings.

If legislative authority had been delegated solely to humans, they would not have taken true justice into consideration and would have enacted laws according to material and personal interests. Moreover, in the absence of superior morality, which is only possible through faith in God and the hereafter, the existence of just laws cannot contribute to the perpetuity of society and serve as the groundwork for material welfare in this world as well as perfection and happiness in the next world. Given the urgent need of mankind for divine guidance and the *principle of general guidance*, the necessity of the mission [bi'that] of the prophets ('a) and their presence in human society is so evident that it cannot be denied.

Those who assert that the interests of humanity in this world do not need prophetic teachings because we presently witness civilizations devoid of revealed teachings and founded on atheism have ignored the following points:

Firstly, notwithstanding a verbal denial in terms of beliefs and moral principles, humankind of today is in fact deeply indebted to the prophets ('a). There are many religious virtues that hold various societies intact which are actually products of the prophets' ('a) efforts. When looking at history it is clear that humanity has benefited much from the teachings of the prophets ('a). Without the teachings of the prophets would humankind have a stable collective life or would people lead a more bestial life in which right and value would be the slaves of power and might.21

Secondly, Muslim philosophers do not claim that without the existence of the prophets ('a) and their teachings, no society could be founded whatsoever. They are rather referring to a society which serves as the grounds for human perfection and eternal bliss in the hereafter. 22 What rational person can claim that without the guidance of God he can enact a code of law which is not only just and guarantees the perpetuity of human race in this world but is also codified in such a manner that it ensures eternal happiness and felicity in the next world? Only the prophets ('a) can teach the members of society and train them such that they would observe the rights of others completely. Only the prophets ('a) can reform man, send him back to his original nature which is God's spirit, and make him immortal by the grace and mercy of God:

"It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. And to others from among them [as well] who have not yet joined them."23

#### **Some notes**

1. In addition to their holy scripture (the Qur'an), the Muslims have access to a great literary corpus called *Sunnah*. In general, *Sunnah* refers to the recorded narrations [riw [y]]] of the Holy Prophet ([)] 24 and infallible Im [ms ('a). A considerable section of these narrations explains practical laws on the individual and collective life but many narrations also expound ideological tenets and even deal with the natural world and humanity.

The issue of the necessity of prophethood and the blessings of the prophets has been also reflected in numerous narrations. Here, it suffices to mention two narrations. From the following two narrations, it can be discerned to what extent the writings of philosophers and theologians in this regard are indebted to the *Sunnah*.

a. In reply to someone who asked for a proof of prophethood, Imm and I

"As we have proven that God, the All-wise, is our Creator who is Most Sublime and Exalted to be comprehended and communicated by anyone, we know that there must be prophets among the people to speak on His behalf, express His will and guide the people about what is good and bad on which depend their fate. So, there must be bidders and forbidders who are none other than the prophets ('a)."25

b. In Sermon 1 of Nahj al-Bal ghah, 26 Im m 'Al ('a) said:

فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رُسُلَهُ، وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِياءُهُ، لِيَسْتَأْدُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ، وَيُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ، وَيَحْتَجُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بَالتَّبْلِيغِ، وَيُغَدِّرُهِ مَنْ سَقْف فَوْقَهُمْ مَرْفُوع، وَمِهَاد تَحْتَهُمْ مَوْضُوع، وَمَعَايِشَ تُحْيِهِمْ، وَيُثِيرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ، وَيُرُوهُمْ آيَاتِ الْمَقْدِرَةِ: مِنْ سَقْف فَوْقَهُمْ مَرْفُوع، وَمِهَاد تَحْتَهُمْ مَوْضُوع، وَمَعَايِشَ تُحْيِهِمْ، وَأَوْصَاب تُهْرِمُهُمْ، وَأَحْدَاث تَتَابَعُ عَلَيْهمْ .

"Then Allah sent His Messengers and a series of His prophets towards them to get them to fulfill the pledges of His creation, to recall to them His bounties, to exhort them by preaching, to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom and show them the signs of His Omnipotence namely the sky which is raised over them, the earth that is placed beneath them, means of living that sustain them, death which brings an end to everything, ailments that turn them old and incidents that successively betake them!"27

2. Both philosophical and theological arguments show the intellect's limitations in identifying the rational

and humane way of life which raises man above the bestial form of living. These limitations are more evident with respect to the otherworldly life which is beyond comprehension of the intellect.

However, the limitations of the intellect do not negate its value and credibility. It is only in comparison with the extensive needs of humanity that we talk about the limitations of the intellect. Similarly, whenever we talk about the insufficiency of the senses, this does not mean we deny their exceptional cognitive functions. Everyone knows that in the absence of the senses, the intellect or reason cannot function properly. Conversely, without the intellect the senses cannot function at all. The same is true in the case of reason ['aql'] and revelation [water]. Reason is kindled under the auspices of revelation. Without the latter, the former will wander in the valley of the unknown. Meanwhile, it is also by the hint of reason that revelation is welcomed, and it is in the hearts of those who apply reason that the tree of revelation bears fruit:

#### "Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge fear Him." 28

"Reason ['aql'] and religious law [shar']have no option [but to acknowledge] that reason is the basis or foundation while religious law is the structure. A structure without foundation is baseless while a foundation without any structure is useless."29

In the words of a Christian theologian, Ian Barbour, "Revelation does not negate reason but rather develops it. Reflection and research could be compatible with religious commitment."30

- 3. It is sometimes assumed that the concept of "the necessity of doing an action" cannot be applied to God on the grounds that accepting such necessity implies setting a duty for Him to discharge and it does not behoove Him to be *obligated* by others. Therefore, what do we really mean by saying that—it is 'incumbent upon' or 'necessary' for God to send down prophets? Do we want to set dos and don'ts for God?! For this reason, the Ash'arites [Ash irah] have entirely avoided discussing the necessity of prophethood.
- 4. What is meant by the necessity for God to *do an action* is that the human intellect or reason understands the continuity of this action within the context of the will of God and perceives God as the Doer of the action. For example, when we say that God is the Necessary Being [wijib al-wujid] it means that the Being cannot be separated or detached from the Divine Essence [dhit-e ilihi]. When we say that it is necessary for God to send down prophets, it means nothing except that God is All-wise and so benevolent to humanity that it is impossible for Him not to send prophets.31
  - 1. The abbreviation, "'a" stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, 'alayhi's–sal®m, 'alayhim'us–sal®m, or 'alayh®'s–sal®m [may peace be upon him/them/her], which is mentioned after the names of the prophets, angels, Im®ms from the Prophet's progeny, and saints ('a). [Trans.]

- 2. In this volume, I have maintained the word "Shī 'ah" to refer to both the group (single collective unit) and the individuals constituting the group (plural). [Trans.]
- 3. See Murtall Mulahharl, Understanding Islamic Sciences (London: ICAS Press, 2002), p. 57-84. [Trans.]
- 4. See ash-Shar@f al-Murta@@, Adh-dhakh@rah f@ 'Ilm al-Kal@m, p. 323.
- Sayyid Murta 4 (Alam al-Hud (355-436 AH): a man of versatility with a keen taste and talent for literature, jurisprudence and theology whose verdicts and opinions are taken into account even today. Both he and his brother Sayyid ar-Ra 4, the compiler of Nahj al-Bal ghah, studied from Shaykh al-Muf d. [Trans.]
- <u>5.</u> Some theologians point out the origin of the difference between good and bad actions, believing that its criterion is the effects they bring about in the lives of human beings. Accordingly, good deeds are the source of felicity while evil deeds lead to perdition.
- 6. Regarding its literal and semantic definitions, see Mu®ahhar®, Understanding Islamic Sciences, pp. 11-19. [Trans.]
- 7. Hadrat: The Arabic word Hadrat is used as a respectful form of address. [Trans.]
- 8. One of Islam's leading philosophers, al-Ferebe was born at Fereb, situated on the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), the modern Otrar. Coming to Baghdad, he studied under the Christian doctor Johanna, son of Hilan. Another of his teachers was Abe Bishr Matta, known as a translator of Greek works. He next proceeded to Aleppo, to the court of Sayf ad-Dawlah, son of Hamden, and led a somewhat retired life under his protection, assuming the garb of a Sufi. When this prince captured Damascus, he took the philosopher with him, and there Ferebe died in 339 AH/950. Ferebe's literary production was considerable, but a great number of his works were lost very early. They were chiefly commentaries or explanations of the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. In the sphere of moral philosophy he wrote a commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics; in that of political philosophy, he made a summary of Plato's Laws, and composed a short treatise on the Ideal City. To psychology and metaphysics he contributed numerous works, with such titles as Intelligence and the Intelligible, The Soul, The Faculties of the Soul, The One and Unity, Substance, Time, The Void, and Space and Measure. He also commented on Alexander of Aphrodisias' book, de Anima. Believing that Greek philosophy was a unity, he labored to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, and with this idea wrote treatises on The Aims of Plato and Aristotle and The Agreement between Plato and Aristotle. He also discussed certain interpretations of Aristotle proposed by Galen and John Philoponus, and composed An Intervention between Aristotle and Galen. [Trans.]
- 9. Abī 'Alī al-Husayn ibn 'Abdullīh ibn Sīnī, or Avicenna, entitled al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs, or Hujjat al-Haqq by his compatriots, simply Shaykh by his disciples, and the Prince of Physicians in the occidental world, was born near Bukh ere in the year 370 AH/980. When Ibn Sene was five years old he and his family moved to the city of Bukhere, where the young boy had a greater opportunity to study. At the age of ten he already knew grammar, literature, and theology as well as the whole of the Qur'an. When the famous mathematician, Abe 'Abdulleh al-Natele, came to Bukhere, he was invited to stay at the house of Ibn Sene in order to teach him mathematics. Under his tutelage Ibn Sene mastered the Almagest, the Elements of Euclid and some logic, all of which he soon knew better than his teacher. Having mastered mathematics, he then turned his attention to physics, metaphysics, and medicine. By the time he was sixteen, Ibn Sene had mastered all the sciences of his day and was well known as a physician. In another two years, thanks to the commentary of al-Ferebe, he was also to complete his understanding of Aristotle's metaphysics which at first had presented considerable difficulty for him. Despite the loss in part or in toto of several of his major works, such as the twenty-volume Kit®b al-Ins®f on the arbitration of Eastern and Western philosophy and the Lis®n al-'Arab in ten volumes, over two-hundred and fifty books, treatises, and letters of Ibn Sene have survived. They range from the voluminous Kiteb ash-Shife and Al-Qenen fi't-Tibb to treatises of only a few pages like Riselat al-Fi'll wal-Infi'ell and Riselah fi's-Sirr al-Qadar. His books can be roughly divided into four separate groups: the philosophical, religious, cosmological and physical, and finally the symbolical and metaphysical narratives. Kit©b ash-Shif©, a vast philosophical and scientific encyclopedia, is probably the largest work of its kind ever written by one man. His dominating influence in medicine, philosophy and theology has lasted over the ages and is still alive within the circles of Islamic thought. [Trans.]
- 10. A towering figure of the Illuminationist School of Islamic Philosophy [ishreqe], Shaheb ad-Den Yahye Suhrawarde (known as Shaykh al-Ishreqe), was born in Suhraward, near Zanjen, Iran in 1155. After studying in Isfahen, a leading center of Islamic scholarship, Suhrawarde traveled through Iran, Anatolia and Syria. Influenced by mystical teachings, he spent much time in meditation and seclusion, and in Halab (modern Aleppo) he favorably impressed its ruler, Malik az-Zehir. His

teachings, however, aroused the opposition of established and learned religious men ['ulams], who persuaded Malik to have him put to death. The appellation al-Maqtill [the killed one] meant that he was not to be considered a shahled [martyr]. Suhraward wrote voluminously. The more than 50 works that were attributed to him were classified into two categories: doctrinal and philosophical accounts containing commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Plato, as well as his contribution to the Illuminationist School; and shorter treatises, generally written in Persian and of an esoteric nature, meant to illustrate the paths and journeys of a mystic before he could achieve ma'rifah (gnosis or esoteric knowledge). [Trans.] 11. - Mulle Sadre (d. 1050 AH/1640), also called Sadrudden Shereze and Sadr al-Muta'allihen, was a philosopher who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century. The foremost representative of Ishreq [Illuminationist] School of philosopher-mystics, he is commonly regarded by Iranians as the greatest philosopher of Iran. A scion of a notable Shereze family, Mulle Sadre completed his education in Isfahen, then the leading cultural and intellectual center of Iran. After his studies with scholars there, he produced several works, the most famous of which was his Asfer (Journeys). Asfer contains the bulk of his philosophy, which was influenced by a personal mysticism bordering on asceticism that he experienced during a 15-year retreat at Kahak, a village near Qum in Iran. Toward the end of his life, Mull® Sadr® returned to Sherez to teach. His teachings, however, were considered heretical by the orthodox Shereah theologians, who persecuted him, though his powerful family connections permitted him to continue to write. He died on a pilgrimage to Mecca. [Trans.] 12. - See Sayyid Mutammad tusayn tabttabtit, Al-Mtztn ft Tafstr al-Quritn, vol. 2, under the commentary of Strah al-Baqarah 2:213. See also Murtate Mueahhare, Nubuwwat [Prophethood] in Majme eh-ye ether [Anthology of Musahhars's Works], vol. 4, p. 398.

13. – Strah to to 20:50. In this volume, the translation of Qur'anic passages is adapted from Sayyid 'Alt Quit Qart't, The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

- 14. SIrah NaII 16:68.
- 15. Sirah iid 38:27.
- 16. Sirah Mu'minin 23:115.
- 17. Strah An'tm 6:91.
- 18. SIrah Hijr 15:28-29.
- 19. Quoted in Marta Nusham (?), Aristotle, trans. 'Izzat All®h F®®dvand, p. 99. It can be said that Aristotle alludes to those who say that man is flesh, skin and blood and nothing else, and the perfection of human life must be sought in the same animalistic life.
- 20. Ibn Sene, Ash-Shife, Theology Section, p. 44.
- 21. For more information see Mulahharl, Nubuwwat in Majmlieh-ye lithlir, vol. 4, pp. 351, 364.
- 22. 'Abd ar-Razzeq Leheje, Guzedeh-ye Gehar-e Mured, ed. eamad Muwaeeid, p. 252.
- 23. Serah Jum'ah 62:2-3.
- 24. The abbreviation, "s", stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, sallall hu 'alayhi wa Ilihi wa sallam [may God's blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny], which is mentioned after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). [Trans.]
- 25. UTT al-KTT, vol. 1, p. 168 (with slight modification).
- 26. Nahj al-Bal
  ghah (The Peak of Eloquence) is a collection of speeches, sayings and letters of the Commander of the Faithful, Im
  im 'Al
  ibn Ab
  T
  iblib ('a) compiled by Shar
  if ar
  Rad
  if Muhammad ibn al
  Husayn (d. 406 AH/1016). The contents of the book concern the three essential topics of God, man and the universe, and include comments on scientific, literary, social, ethical, and political issues. With the exception of the words of the Glorious Qur'an and of the Holy Prophet (s), no words of man can equal it in eloquence. So far, more than 101 exegeses have been written on the Nahj al
  Bal
  ighah, indicating the importance of this treatise to scholars and learned men of research and investigation. For more information, visit: <a href="http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul">http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul</a> [1]. [Trans.]
- 27. Syed 'Ali Raza, Nahj al-Bal ghah: The Peak of Eloquence (Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World, 1995), Sermon 1. [Trans.]
- 28. STrah FTTir (or al-MalTikah) 35:28.
- 29. Ristlah Hidtyah at-telibiyyen in the anthology of treatises of the great philosopher tej Mulle Hedt Sabziwert,

introduced and edited by Sayyid Jalel Ashtiyene, p. 10.

- 30. Ian Barbour, 'Ilm va Den [Science and Religion], trans. Bahe'udden Khurramshehe, p. 305.
- Ian G. Barbour (1923–) is an American scholar of the relationship between science and religion whose 1989–91 Gifford Lectures yielded the widely recognized texts, Religion in an Age of Science (1990) and Ethics in an Age of Technology (1993). His earlier Issues in Science and Religion (1965), widely acclaimed as a groundbreaking volume, discussed the relationship of religious thought to the history, methods, and theories of science. As a physicist and theologian, Barbour was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1999 for Progress in Religion in recognition of his efforts to create a dialogue between the worlds of science and religion. [Trans.]
- 31. Musahhars, Nubuwwat in Majmséh-ye sther, vol. 4, p. 365. For in-depth discussion on the meaning of "necessity" with respect to God, see Sayyid Musammad susayn sabssabse, Al-Mszen fe Tafser al-Qur'en, vol. 14, p. 94.

# Section Two: The Contributions and Blessings of the Prophets

# **General Objectives**

After studying this discourse, students are expected:

- 1. To be acquainted with the contributions and blessings of the prophets ('a) in the domains of science, ethics, social justice, and mysticism; and
- 2. To realize the status of knowledge in religion and to be informed about the various approaches concerning the relationship between science and religion.

In the discussion on the necessity of prophethood, we pointed out a set of blessings of prophethood the absence of which would indicate failure in the guidance and deliverance of man or at least would make it very difficult for man to tread the path of felicity. Now, we shall make an overview of the blessings of the prophets which facilitate wayfaring in the valley of deliverance in this world and the hereafter.

# The Prophets and Morality

Ethics or morality [akhleq] which is one of the perennial foundations of human life has always been observed. It is so valuable that even those who are practically deprived of it verbally praise and wish to have it.

Within ethics there is discussion about voluntary actions and man's psychological judgment on their being good or bad, mandatory or not mandatory.

As the spokespersons of religion, the prophets ('a) have a pivotal role and contribution within the domain

of ethics. Some functions of the prophets ('a) and divine revelation in the domain of ethics are related to the identification of the goodness or badness of man's volitional actions and states. The function of revelation is to introduce and identify truths. Revelation expounds in detail what the intellect generally perceives.

In addition to this, the prophets ('a) and revelation have another vital role or function which is related to moral training. This role or function manifests itself in two ways:

- 1. Divine revelation facilitates moral training and development. That is, because it regards moral actions in this world as the preconditions for happiness and prosperity in the next world, it encourages progress in this regard. In fact, eternal happiness and prosperity is a reflection of the moral actions or righteous deeds of the world.
- 2. Through their actions, the prophets (a) set perfect examples for mankind and pave the necessary practical grounds for moral training.

Those who are acquainted with affairs related to upbringing, training and education know the extent of the necessity of functional models for the moral training of humankind. The lives of the prophets ('a) demonstrated practical models for their respective communities. Through their innate attractive qualities, they guided their people toward their well-being and deliverance:

#### "In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good example."1

Yes, the intellect and intellectuals have a role or contribution in promoting morality, but intellectual language (philosophy) is not clear, expressive and attractive enough for the common people. As such, human history has always owed its greatest moral achievements to the prophets ('a) for they were the ones who imparted moral teachings to the common people in simple language. It is the last of the prophets who explicitly said: "Indeed I have been sent to perfect moral values." He (s) also said: "Indeed I have been chosen for the perfection of good deeds." 3

The efforts of philosophers in searching for moral principles and those of moral teachers in identifying moral affairs cannot be denied, but if human history were devoid of the presence of the prophets ('a) the discussion on ethics would be confined to the four walls of the classroom and there would be no indication of the common people's reception to it. Since the edifice of civilization lies in morality, it can be imagined to what extent the different civilizations of the world are indebted to the teachings of the prophets ('a) and their actual conduct in life.

#### The prophets and knowledge

Nowadays, science is a great facet with a crucial role in the life of humanity. At the present time, the word "science" refers primarily to the empirical sciences which are divided into two areas: (1) natural sciences and (2) social sciences and humanities. In the past, different types of knowledge were all under the rubric of "philosophy" which means "love of knowledge," and 'ilm [knowledge or science] was understood in its general sense and it included every science or branch of knowledge. As such, we shall assess in this book the contributions of the prophets ('a) to 'ilm in its general sense, i.e. "knowledge", and also examine their influence—and basically the relationship between science and religion—to 'ilm in its new sense, i.e. "empirical sciences."

#### 1. The prophets ('a) and knowledge

Under the motto of teaching and training, the prophets ('a) have always embarked upon propagating the religion and conveying the divine message. They exerted most of their efforts in removing the obstacles along the way of 'search for knowledge'. The prophets ('a) were often hated because of their incessant struggle against ignorance, superstition and blind following.

"No prophet has come with a mission other than inviting his people to desist from blindly following their forefathers and the ancients, asking them to reflect and freeing them from the bondage of dominant or prevailing unpleasant traditions."4

The following famous account is familiar to all. One day the Holy Prophet (1) saw two groups in the mosque—one group was busy in worship and devotional acts, and the other was engaged in learning and seeking knowledge. By conveying a hint that showed the value of knowledge in the sight of the prophets ('a), he expressed more pleasure towards the group that was engaged in learning and seeking knowledge.

Yes, the learned and the ignorant are not equal and in the religious value system; the learned, on account of the knowledge they possess, are always superior to the ignorant. Even a little knowledge of religious teachings and principles is an indication of literacy and love of knowledge, and everyone must know that religion is not a hindrance to knowledge but rather its vanguard. How could the religion whose motto is, "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" encourage ignorance, illiteracy and blind following?

The following statement of the Holy Prophet (1) to 1at rat 'Al (1a) in this regard is quite interesting:

"O 'Alo! In the race for nearness to God, if you mount the horse of knowledge, learning and reflection, you will be ahead of everybody including those who hasten toward God by means of worship, prayer and fasting, and you will attain divine proximity."5

#### 2. The prophets ('a) and empirical sciences

To know and understand properly the positions of science and religion is so important for us. Alfred North Whitehead,6 a great mathematician and philosopher of the 20th century, says:

"When we reflect on the value and importance of religion and science for mankind, it is not absurd to say that the future course of history depends on this generation's treatment of the relationship between these two."7

Before mentioning the different viewpoints on the relationship between science and religion, it is necessary to note that man is in need of religion as well as science. Any perspective on man not being in need of both religion and science is inconsistent with the reality of man. Throughout history, there have been those who have striven to observe natural phenomena and explain them based on religion and also search for the source of natural laws from the Bible.

Sometimes, contributions in this context were even treated unkindly. An illustrious example of these oppositions was the case of Galileo whose scientific theory that the sun was the center of the universe—in opposition to the then prevailing Ptolemaic geocentrism—was strongly condemned by the ecclesiastical authority.

Under the pretext of religion, if we want to assume that human beings are not in need of empirical sciences and ignore their scientific efforts, it will bring nothing except darkness, ignorance and Bedouin life. Have not those who regard science thus in the name of religion read the Qur'an which invites us repeatedly to the study nature?

"Say: Travel over the land and then observe how He has originated the creation"8

"There is indeed a sign in that (the life of the bees) for a people who reflect."9

"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." 10

Therefore, religion does not seek to replace or put an end to scientific theories. In fact, encouragement

to learn the natural sciences is an integral part of correct religious teachings.

Regrettably though, by excessive reliance on science under the pretext of progress in empirical sciences, some have imposed restrictions on religion and regarded mankind as needless of religion in this age of scientific progress and development. Scientism has so much rubbed some of discernment that they have not only been deprived of proper understanding of religion and its role in their lives, but they have also lost sight of their object of worship (i.e. science as it must be known and its jurisdiction and limitations).

This notion that science is the panacea to all problems of humankind was at its peak during the Renaissance and the scientific revolution and even now some still believe in it.

According to this idea, anything that cannot be empirically tested is meaningless and has no truth-value. Hence, religious claims such as the existence of God, angels and the Resurrection are all claims devoid of any truth-value for they cannot be put to experiment. Accordingly, even if religion once had a role in the life of humanity, it had already played its role and its period has expired.

Of course, scientific empiricism is not that prominent at present. Natural scientists acknowledge that the foundations of the sciences are elements that cannot be empirically tested. They emphasize that many scientific principles are actually derived from religion. According to these scientists, by emphasizing the reality of nature, the inherent unity of its different facets, the possibility of discovering its laws, and the status or station of nature as a reflection of divine knowledge, it is religion which has provided the necessary points of departure for the formation of science in the life of humankind.11

Science is indebted to religion more than is imagined or generally accepted. It is religion which considers nature as a mirror to know God, encouraging and giving us hope to know Him and helping us in seeking knowledge at the threshold of religious civilizations.

"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, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You!"12

"Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the

ships that sail at sea with profit to men, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky—with which He revives the earth after its death, and scatters therein every kind of animal—and the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for a people who apply reason."13

Moreover, if ever mankind hoped that science would solve all human problems during the past two centuries, today it has fully realized that it has not only failed to solve all problems but rather it has brought about even more serious problems. Progress in physics has heightened universal concern about destructive nuclear wars. Advanced production technologies have created worry about rapid environmental destruction. Worse still, technology has caused apprehension that humanity is now exploiting the divine blessings (natural resources) that belong to the human race at a rate that will deplete these non-renewable reserves.

In any case, science is no more that 'deity' that attracts scientists from all persuasions. Today, the need to pay closer attention to the role of religion in life and even its role in establishing scientific foundations and restrictions has been heeded and acknowledged by many scientists. As such, we must have a balanced view and understanding of the role and function of religion and science and place each of them in its own domain.

There are three views regarding the relationship between religion and science as follows:

#### A. Science and religion are two opposing poles

Some imagine that science and religion are rivals and that if religion flourishes it will have an arbitrary effect on science and vice versa. Unfortunately, it cannot be denied that the improper attitude of the clergy—particularly during the Middle Ages—in dealing with science has strengthened the rationale behind this notion.

The basic assumption here is that religion, like empirical sciences, aims at discovering natural laws. However, in most cases the ever–changing scientific views are at odds with some immutable religious accounts especially about the natural world. The Christian Bible, according to the church leaders, supports the geocentric notion that the earth is the center of the universe, while science has acknowledged the sun as the center of the universe (solar system). As another example, religion endorses the theory of fixed creation of species while science allegedly talks about the evolution of species.

Those who enjoyed the utilities of science and considered them to be in conflict with religion denied the latter. It is said that whenever a person turns away from the true religion, another thing or a set of things will pose as "religion" though it may not explicitly assume the name "religion". At our present period, some have replaced religion with science. The reason behind this is insufficient knowledge of the true religion and the reality of the world, which is marred with hundreds of mistakes.

#### B. Science and religion are two parallel lines that do not intersect each other

The contention of those who cannot agree with the setting aside of religion in the domain of life is that religion and science are two different and separate things and have their own specific yet different functions and utilities. As such, any contradiction between them is baseless. Contradiction between two things happens when they deal with a single subject and give different opinions about it. However, if the subject, goal and even method of one are different from that of the other, conflict between them will never happen. The basic assumption here is that the function of science is to explain natural events through observation and experiment in order to predict future events and gain supremacy over nature. In contrast, the function of religion is totally different and applicable somewhere else.

Carl Bart, a Protestant theologian, believed that theology and science dealt with basically different subjects. The subject of theology was the manifestation of God in Christ while that of science was the natural world. The Almighty God could only be known through His manifestation while nature was known through the human intellect.

Existentialist philosophers usually regard scientific knowledge as objective and impersonal and religious knowledge as profoundly personal and subjective. The subject of science is material objects and their roles and functions while the subject of religion is personal and moral realities.

Hermeneutists treat religion and science as two different linguistic games, each of which has been programmed for a specific goal. The goal of the scientific language is generally prediction and control while the language of religion is used for purposes like prayer and peace of mind. 14

In any case, those who believe in the basic distinction between religion and science—as well as the subject, method and goal of each of them—try to bring back again religion in the life of man after being sidetracked by those who believe in their conflicting nature and assign a role to it which is different from that of science.

#### C. Science and religion are complimentary

In recent years, some have claimed that it is possible for religion and science to have a single subject while each has its own goal or aim. They do not accept that the subject of one must be different from that of the other, arguing that in many cases, religion has also dealt with natural events. Having an identical subject does not bring about any conflict between them even though the religious explanation of a natural event may be quite different from the scientific explanation. For example, there may be two different explanations of an advertisement billboard posted at a library. One explanation may be concerned with the billboard's quality and the like while the other explanation's concern may be the intention of the billboard's owner for displaying it. Both explanations pertain to one and the same thing but, since they have different goals, no contradiction between them arises. In fact, the explanations are complimentary.

Those who believe that science and religion are complimentary have asserted that whenever religion talks about the natural world, the purpose is to unravel the *meaning* and *implications* of natural events while science is concerned with the *causes* of natural events.

If we pay careful attention to these three views, one thing seems to be common in all of them and that is that religion does not talk about the *causes* of natural events. When religion discusses nature, it pertains to the significance and *implications* of real events—the main motive in any religious message is to highlight the *meaning* of events. For this reason, the Holy Qur'an considers events in the world as "signs" [IyIt] which show the power, knowledge and grace of God. It is said that the phenomena in the world are all "beauties" [jamalIt] which suggests that they are all linked to God and orient us back to Him—the origin of all beauty.

However, negligence of one important and fundamental point has led to a misunderstanding regarding the relationship between science and religion, and that point is that sometimes religion does actually discuss the *causes* of things and events—just as science does. Religion has mentioned the manner of the occurrence of rain, currents of rain, etc. Discussion of the meaning of events is not in conflict with examination of their causes. This is basically the distinctive feature of the religious worldview—to link meanings and ideals with events in the world and reflect them in the fundamental realities of the universe. It must not be overlooked, therefore, that some religious textual accounts do indeed have scientific relevance.

In such an interpretation of religion, there is the possibility of lack of harmony between a "religious account" and a "scientific finding". In reply, it must be stated that there must always be a logical explanation for conflict between these two, and there are ways that harmony can be established. One way is to interpret religious texts as much as permissible so that they are understood in the proper context. Another method is to realize that scientific theories are mixed with speculation and need for further investigation. To pay heed to these two points is enough reason not to take these alleged contradictions between science and religion too seriously.

A more fundamental and important point is that the many contradictions between the Bible and science cannot be applied to the Qur'an. Perhaps, one of the reasons behind the occurrence of contradiction between science and religion in Christianity is the distortions [tarref] made to the Bible and this blemish has not been able to taint the Qur'an with regard to science.

Many testimonies have been made and books written about the compatibility of the Qur'anic verses with scientific findings. It is clear that far from being based on realities, this alleged contradiction between science and religion derives from the conflict between religion and scientism, as well as the clash between science, and religious intransigence and narrow–mindedness. As such, belief in any sort of contradiction between religion and knowledge has no benefit except hindering scientific progress and undermining the credibility of religion, while perfect harmony and compatibility exists between the two.

All basic scientific presumptions have flourished and gained acceptance under the auspices of Islamic teachings and perhaps the following saying of Imem 'Ale ('a) points to this indisputable truth:

"The life of knowledge lies on faith." 15

#### The prophets and social justice

One of the proofs advanced by Muslim philosophers regarding the necessity of prophethood and the existence of prophets ('a) is the necessity of the implementation of just laws in society so that the people can live in peace and tranquility:

"Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice." 16

However, the prophets ('a) have a further role in the implementation of justice and that is their incessant struggle against tyrants and oppressors, which sometimes had led to their persecution or their martyrdoms.

Many accounts of the prophets' ('a) confrontations with the oppressors of their respective times, from which we can learn so many lessons, have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. These struggles against oppression taught lessons of martyrdom and bravery to others and gave a religious and ideological color to their confrontations so as to remove forever the notion that their struggles for justice were for worldly purposes from the minds of comfort–seekers who urged people to keep silent under all conditions.

# The prophets and mysticism

Having the splendid celestial fragrance, the prophets ('a) have enlivened the sacred emotions of humanity, elevated the emotions and feelings beyond the level of animal instincts, and opened the windows of the Unseen [ghayb] and celestial world [malak t]. The greatest mystical discovery and intuition have occurred in the midst of religious civilizations. Certainly, had it not been for the efforts of the prophets ('a) in fostering fondness and familiarity between celestial beings and mortals, humankind could not have sensed the aroma of the unseen by the use of his intellect and perceptions.

The Lord of the prophets ('a) is compassionate. He answers the call of anyone, anytime. He is nearer to man than his own jugular vein. 17 Such a God is always heart–ravishing for man. It is this very love of Him which is the driving force for humankind to seek His pleasure. God delivers humanity from bewilderment and confusion and informs of the purpose behind creation. By doing so, God gives assurance, enthusiasm and interest in life. Belief in the Resurrection is not only belief in the immortality

of the soul, but also a depiction of the physical existence of human beings in the next world which reflects the way they led their lives in this world. Therefore, mindfulness about and reflection upon the Resurrection play pivotal roles in dispelling hopelessness and despair in life.

The blessings brought by the prophets (*'a*) are far beyond that which could be written. So, we shall end our discussion here by citing an example of the manifestation of their blessings throughout history.

# An example of the manifestation of the blessings of the prophets

The most recent event of the sending of prophets ('a) by God is related to the religion of Islam. Reflection on this event will lead to acknowledgment of what has been said. Islam was first propagated in the TijTz 18 by the Prophet Mutammad (t). The barren land of TijTz had little trace of culture and civilization of its own. It was a land whose people used to describe in poetry their acts of aggression and plunder and vie with each other to gain reputation and glory.

The people of <code>Tij</code> had neither clean water nor wholesome food. Out of ignorance and a spirit of infanticide, fathers would bury their innocent daughters so as to be safe from the enemies' taunt! 19 In the <code>Tij</code> might was right. The emotional outbursts of the people expressed descriptions of things relevant to animal instincts not reports of spiritual experiences.

However, in the same land of <code>[ij]</code>, there emerged men and women who not only found the way to salvation but also paved the necessary ground for the emergence of the great Islamic civilization by leading others to the path of guidance and salvation. Hearts which had no equal in hardness and darkness turned into sources of mystical intuitiveness and attracted people from every direction. The alchemy of the presence of the Prophet Mullammad (①) and the assistance of his devoted companions, especially the Master of the Monotheists <code>[mawl® al-muwallid</code> 'All ('a), turned the copper of the existence of these people into pure gold:

Yes, by the blessing of your kindness,

The soil will turn into gold.

Unfortunately, we cannot cover here all the dimensions of Islamic civilization whose seed sprouted in this very land (⑤ij⑥z) and whose branches and shoots extended to other lands. Even voluminous books and innumerable articles could not do the same.

- 1. Strah Atztb 33:21.
- 2. Kanz al-'Umm®l, vol. 11, p. 420, ®ad®th 31969.
- 3. Ibn Sa'd, TabaqTt, vol. 1, p. 192.
- 4. Musahhars, Nubuwwat in Majme'eh-ye sther, vol. 4, p. 36.
- 5. Ibn Sene, Riselah Mi'rejiyyah, n. p.
- <u>6.</u> Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947): a British mathematician and metaphysician, and generally recognized as one of the greatest 20th–century philosophers. His collaboration with his former pupil, the British mathematician and philosopher

Bertrand Russell, in writing the three-volume Principia Mathematica (1910–13) produced one of the world's greatest works on logic and mathematics. [Trans.]

- 7. Quoted in Barbour, 'Ilm va Den, p. 13.
- 8. Serah 'Ankabet 29:20.
- 9. STrah NaTl 16:69.
- 10. Serah eli 'Imren 3:190-191, 193.
- 11. For further information about this theory that the foundations of science are based upon religious teachings, see Michael Peterson, et al, 'Aql va I'tiqtd Dtnt [Reason and Religious Belief], trans. Atmad Nartqt and Ibrthtm Sulttnt, p. 383.
- 12. STrah Ili 'ImrIn 3:191.
- 13. Sirah Baqarah 2:164.
- 14. Peterson, et al, 'Aql va l'tiqed Dene, p. 366.
- 15. Nahj al-Baleghah (Suber relie), Sermon 156, p. 219.
- 16. Srah radrd 57:25.
- 17. Serah Qef 50:16: "Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." [Trans.]
- 18. Hij 🗓 z: the region in Western Arabia bordering the Red Sea that includes T 🗉 if, Mecca and Medina. [Trans.]
- 19. It alludes to Sirah an-Nail 16:58–59: "When one of them is brought the news of a female [newborn], his face becomes darkened and he chokes with suppressed agony. He hides from the people out of distress at the news he has been brought: shall he retain it in humiliation, or bury it in the ground! Look! Evil is the judgment that they make."

# **Section Three: Revelation and Miracle**

# **General Objectives**

After studying this discourse, students are expected:

- 1. To understand the difference between revelation [wa1 $\mathbb{I}$ ], intuition [kashf] and witnessing [shuh1 $\mathbb{I}d$ ] by familiarizing themselves with the salient features and types of revelation;
- 2. To be acquainted with miracles performed by a prophet [a'jazah or mu'jizah] and the difference between these and miracles performed by a non-prophet [kir mah] and supernatural affairs, and also the connection between miracles and the truthfulness of the prophets, specifically the miracle of the Qur'an; and lastly
- 3. To know, through a theoretical analysis, the reason behind the finality of prophethood and the way and manner of continuity of man's movement towards perfection.

#### **Revelation**

Every community or nation has witnessed the call of the prophets ('a) and this call has been necessary

and essential. As demonstrated earlier, the intellect can also perceive this necessity. Now, some questions come up that, in spite of their being human beings, how did the prophets ('a) communicate with God and how did they receive His message?

Many people have regarded the idea of creatures communicating with the Creator as one of the unbelievable things:

Does it seem odd to these people that We have revealed to a man from among themselves, [declaring], 'Warn mankind, and give good news to the faithful that they are in good standing with their Lord'? The faithless say, 'This is indeed a plain magician'. 1

The Holy Qur'an describes God's messages to the prophets ('a) as "revelation" [wall]. Wall means to impart something in secret. This word is applied in many cases in the Qur'an. This term is sometimes used to reference common individuals:

"We revealed to Moses' mother, [saying], 'Nurse him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear nor grieve, for We will restore him to you and make him one of the apostles." 2

There are also times when it is applied to animals:

"And your Lord revealed to the bee [saying]: Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect."3

Even inanimate objects sometimes receive "divine revelation":

"On that day she (the earth) will relate her chronicles for her Lord will have inspired her."4

The meaning of wall common in all these verses is "guidance or instruction which is hidden from others." God "guides" the mother of MISI (Moses) ('a), the honeybee and the earth, but we do not fully understand the nature of this "guidance". Of course, in every case the divine revelation assumes a particular form in consonance with its recipient.

There is also the guidance for mankind through revelation to special individuals chosen for this purpose:

"We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and [as] We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon—and We gave David the Psalms."5

Our analysis or knowledge of revelation is only based on the prophets' ('a) descriptions of it. To have faith in revelation, which is an essential prerequisite of Islam, does not require complete knowledge of it. To believe in it and the prophets' ('a) claim to it is enough. Of course, understanding and knowledge about the revelation is important in deepening one's religious knowledge. We have no option but to take some steps to know revelation further on the basis of the explanations of the prophets ('a).

Revelation signifies the opening of a window to the unseen world and new horizons of the heaven of meaning to the prophets ( $\dot{a}$ ). Revelation came from God and the Apostle ( $\bar{a}$ ) was not expecting it:

"You did not expect that the Book would be delivered to you; but it was a mercy from your Lord."6

This salient feature shows the superiority of <code>watt</code> to genius <code>[nubt]gh</code>] as well as mystical intuition <code>[kashf]</code> or witnessing <code>[shuht]d</code>]. <code>Nubt]gh</code> means extraordinary intelligence which makes some individuals understand certain "truths" without undergoing the normal pertinent learning processes. However, these types of "truths" are those that could be grasped by the intellect, not truths that are grasped as a result of the opening of new windows.

Genius is like one who has extraordinary senses and can easily sense or feel what others could sense or feel with difficulty. A prophet, on the other hand, is one who has normal senses like all people, in which geniuses are also included; however, in addition he has another sense endowed by God which the others including the geniuses do not have.

Contrary to ware, some may acquire mystical intuition [kashf] or witnessing [shuhrd] as a result of

contentment that stems from man himself. If man were to focus his attention on his soul and after some time control his mutinous soul, he would perceive some truths within the depths of his self which others cannot perceive. He does not acquire these truths from others. Instead, control of the self effaces the indignation in his heart and uncovers the hidden truths within it. In regard to water, however, the prophet only serves as the receiver of the message. He is an addressee of one who talks to with him. It is said that Jibra'll (Archangel Gabriel) ('a) was teaching the Prophet (E):

#### "It is just a revelation that is revealed [to him], taught him by One of great powers."7

The prophets (a) knew very well that somebody else was teaching them what to say, and on many occasions they could see their teacher, who was an angel of God (Jibra'l) (a). However, with *kashf* and *shuh*d, this is not the case.

It is this pure perception which protects  $wa \mathbb{T}$  from any sort of mixture with human words. Contrary to the notion which nowadays is unfortunately advanced by some Christian sects that revelation is inferred from the religious experience of others such that the Bible (the New Testament in particular) is the interpretation or expression of the things which 'IsI (Jesus) ('a) had acquired in his state of *kashf* or *shuh* d, revelation is free from any sort of interpolation or addition by the Prophet (I) in conveying it.

Perhaps the reason why in more than 300 places in the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Prophet (1) is addressed with the command, "Say" [qul] is to stress the fact that his role in conveying the revelation is only to repeat exactly the divine message and that there is not the least room for him to have changed it.

The Apostle (1) was aware of this heavy burden of responsibility. As such, as soon as he received a revelation, he would immediately recite it lest he forgot a word of it—even though God gave him assurance in this regard:

"So, exalted is Allah, the True Sovereign. Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you, and say, 'My Lord! Increase me in knowledge'." 8

For this reason, the prophets chosen by God were those who were not known to have been learned. Some of them did not even know how to read and write. So, it cannot be entertained in the mind that their sayings were a product of their mystical intuition expressed in the language and culture of the time.

"You did not use to recite any scripture before it, nor did you write it with your right hand, for then the impugners would have been skeptical."9

The divine revelation has been conveyed to the people in the form that it had been revealed to the Apostle (1), and in order to remove any doubt about His Messenger (1), God thus says:

"[It is] gradually sent down from the Lord of all the worlds. Had he faked any sayings in Our name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta, and none of you could have held Us off from him. Indeed it is a reminder for the God-wary."10

This verse does not mean that there was the possibility for the Prophet (1) to have distorted the revelation had he not received a threat of an extremely harsh punishment! Such an understanding shows a lack of knowledge of grammatical rules of the language. The verse emphasizes the importance of the protection of the revealed text from any kind of change or distortion.

As an example, it is sometimes said: "Even if my father were to allow it, I would not do it." This style of statement emphasizes the distaste for an action, and does not suggest that the father would really ask one to perform the action. In the same manner, God says that the safety of revelation from any kind of distortion [tarrf] is so vital that even if His most beloved (the Apostle (1)) were to try to distort it (which he wouldn't), He would punish him in the way mentioned in the verse, let alone if this act were to be committed by others we could be sure that the punishment would also certainly be carried out!

In sum, wa is a kind of unusual "intelligence" which is beyond the frame of conventional analysis. It is only possible by the will and permission of God. The fact that it is unusual is the reason it is difficult for some people to accept, and they rightfully ask for proofs of the truthfulness of the receivers of revelation and God grants their requests by showing miracles [mu'jizah] or signs [9yah].

# **Miracles**

The prophets ('a) claimed to be recipients of the divine message through revelation [wass] and, as stated earlier, wass means transcending beyond the boundary of common human perceptions. In other words, revelation itself or the receipt of a message from God is a miracle [muˈjizah] and supernatural. Confirmation of this claim can be made through innate testimony, certainty from the depth of one's soul, or reasoning and inference. Asking for proof of the authenticity of the prophets' claims is something reasonable and wholesome that is usually requested by the people:

#### "They say, 'Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?"11

And whenever this inquiry stems from love of truth, God answers thus:

"Then We sent Moses and Aaron, his brother, with Our signs and a manifest authority." 12

Whenever the people would doubt the authenticity of the prophets' claims or the people's certainty  $[i \ m \ n \ n]$  would diminish for some reason, God would send His signs  $[\ n \ n]$  to the prophets (a) so as to extinguish the faith-consuming fire of doubt and make the torch of conviction brighter. In the parlance of the theologians  $[mutakallim \ n]$ , these signs which substantiate the prophets' claims to revelation are known as miracles [mu'jizah].

It is said that the miracle—though not mentioned in this way in the Qur'an and the Bible—is one of the essentials [furfriyyft] of religion. Faith in its occurrence—in the sense of faith in the unseen power of the prophets ('a)—is a condition for deliverance. The Bible also cites examples of the occurrence of miracles:

"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." 13

Miracles are also mentioned in many verses of the Glorious Qur'an:

"He said, 'If you have brought a sign, produce it, should you be truthful.' Whereat he threw down his staff, and behold, it became a manifest python. Then he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white to the onlookers."14

Regarding the Holy Prophet (19), it also says:

"The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split. If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic!" 15

These verses refer to the miracle of moon-splitting done by the Prophet Mutammad (1). Now, as there

is no doubt regarding the occurrence of miracles in terms of faith, we shall turn our attention to miracles from the intellectual perspective.

From the intellectual perspective one may ask: Are miracles occurrences without causes? It can be said that, when Ibr \( \text{M} \) ('a) was thrown into a burning fire, it not only suddenly became safe for him without any apparent cause, but it even became a source a comfort. However, such an interpretation of this miracle is not only against the axiomatic principle of reasoning, which associates a cause to every occurrence, but also inconsistent with the logic of the Qur'an which endorses the law of causation.

The acceptance of the occurrence of miracles without any cause is tantamount to the acceptance that things happen by mere chance, which can have dire consequences. For example, if a miracle is supposed to happen without any cause, it is then possible that the entire world of possibilities ['slam-e mumkinst] could have been created without any cause and out of pure chance, which in turn could mean that the world is also not in need of any creator!?16

That, like all phenomena in this world, miracles have causes or sets of causes cannot be doubted. Therefore, it cannot be accepted that any event, including miracles, happens without any cause. However, different schools and persuasions have offered various answers to the question regarding the causes of miracles.

According to the Ash'arites [Ash®'irah] the motive behind the occurrence of miracles is the will of God and the fact that His will is above everything. Based on this belief, the fact that fire is usually warm or a source of heat is only a precedent [sunnah] of Allah which He can change whenever He wishes. Conventionally, fire is hot but this hotness is not its essence for it is changeable. We have no power to change the precedents [sunan] of Allah, but God who has set these precedents in the first place can change them and say to the fire:

"We said, 'O fire! Be cool and safe for Abraham!""17

If You wish [to favor someone], fire can become pleasant water,

And if You do not, even water can become fire!

For the Ash'arites, every event is caused by the will of God. Whenever the fire is hot, the cause is God's will and if it is not hot, it is again because of His will. The only difference is that the first case is repeated many times and assumes the form of a "natural law" while the second case happens rarely.

Philosophers have another view. According to them, the world is not as simple as what the Ash'arites believe. The natural world is essentially governed by the law of causation. The hotness of the fire is a necessity. Of course, this is not in conflict with the absoluteness of divine power, for the will of God is done through an *essential system manifested by the law of causation*. As such, as advocated by prominent figures in the She and world, *mu'jizah* requires explanation and elaboration because it seems to go against the essential system of nature.

Under the assumption that the essential system of the world is accepted, there are two ways of explaining and elaborating the mechanism of *muʻjizah*:

1. *Muʻjizah* seems to outwardly violate the laws of nature, but this is not actually so. In this view, the prophets (*'a*) have knowledge of processes of substitution and replacement which others do not have. They are aware of factors existing in nature which can turn a piece of wood, for instance, into a living object like a snake. By using these factors, they can perform extraordinary acts. Since we do not know the natural process of turning a stick into a snake, we imagine that it is something unnatural. It is said that the prophets (*'a*) knew the secrets of nature through which they were able to perform wonderful acts.

This interpretation, in which there is no room for the intervention of a hidden power, is unacceptable due to the following questions: From where have the prophets ('a) acquired this wonderful knowledge? Is such knowledge acquired through the usual way of learning from others and through research and study? If so, why aren't there scientists in every period who are forerunners in this field? There is no doubt that the prophets' ('a) knowledge of the secrets of nature cannot assume a usual and conventional form. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that they have acquired the secrets of nature through extraordinary and supernatural means. However, if it is possible to become knowledgeable through an unnatural or supernatural way, why then whould it be impossible to turn a stick into a snake through an unnatural way? If a prophet can know the secrets of nature by relying on the knowledge of the unseen, there is no reason, through the same means, they cannot acquire extraordinary powers by which they can control the natural course of affairs.

2. According to the second view, with the help of the unseen, a prophet acquires extraordinary power through which he can control the natural course of affairs in the world. It is said, however, that control over the natural course of affairs takes place within the framework of special rules and this does not equate with going against natural causes. For further clarification, one may take into account a paralyzed person. This physically handicapped person is incapable of movement according to medical principles, but the same person sometimes can surprisingly be able to move in a certain spiritual state. 18 In this case, a spiritual power has exerted influence on the patient's body and changed its natural course. What

is called "psychotherapy" does not mean falsification of biological principles. It rather means utilization of a powerful spiritual force that can have natural effects. Regarding *muʻjizah*, it can also be said that by using hidden powers, the prophets exert control over the natural course of affairs in such a manner that the immutable relationship between cause and effect is preserved. It is only because of the interference of hidden powers that there is a change in the natural course.

There is another issue here and that is, fakirs sometimes perform extraordinary acts, but their dissimilarity with the prophets lies in the power which *causes* such acts. The power of the prophets ('a) pertains to the decree of God while the fakirs perform such acts by enhancing their spiritual power and exerting influence on the natural course of affairs. This difference becomes clear when we realize that, firstly, the human power possessed by fakirs, no matter how strong it is, can also be acquired by others and secondly, it is always inferior to the unseen power. The power of the prophets ('a), on the other hand, is not human–based but rather God–given and extraordinary. It is therefore always dominant and can never be imparted to others.

While acknowledging the role of natural factors in the system of creation and the essential relationship between cause and effect, some Muslim scholars give justification to *muʻjizah* and the intervention of unnatural forces in the natural course of affairs without invalidating their natural effects. In other words, *muʻjizah* does not take place by undermining natural laws but rather by making use of a natural law and the application of an unnatural force.

# Miracles as proof of the truthfulness of the prophets ('a)

In an attempt to differentiate mu'jizah from kir mah, which is also a performance of extraordinary acts, books on 'ilm al-kalm associate mu'jizah with the claim of prophethood and the receipt of revelation, and the absence of these elements in the case of kirmah. In contrast to mortification (practiced by fakirs), kirmah relates to seeking help from the Unseen without the purpose of proving any claim to prophethood. The very association of mu'jizah with the claim to prophethood is the basis of proof of the authenticity of the claim.

Apart from proving the possibility of revelation, based on the famous philosophical rule that similar things have identical rulings, 19 mu'jizah shows that just as power can be acquired from the Unseen and a stick be turned into a snake, the word of God can also be received from the Unseen and knowledge be acquired and taught to others.

As mentioned earlier, wall itself is a mu'jizah and an extraordinary occurrence. If miracles exist, there is also the possibility of wall. However, the role of mu'jizah lies more in proving the occurrence of wall and not its possibility, and mu'jizah's role in proving the authenticity of the prophets' claim lies in the receipt of revelation. We shall explain by citing an example:

If an official attributes something to a ruler in the ruler's presence and addresses the people present,

saying that the ruler has said such-and-such, and then in order to prove the authenticity of his claim, says that the sign of the truthfulness of his claim is, contrary to the customary way, that the ruler will clap his hands three times and then, after hearing this, the ruler claps three times, will the people still doubt the truthfulness of the official's claim? The same is the case with *mu'jizah* in proving the authenticity of the prophets' claim. In the presence of God, prophets address the people, saying that God has said certain things and the proof of our truthfulness is that God gives us extraordinary power for us to do wonderful acts in nature. When the prophets perform those wonderful acts, is there any doubt that they are telling the truth? As such, *mu'jizah* plays an important role in showing the truthfulness of the prophets (*'a*) revelation.

Has the period of miracles ended and are miracles no longer performed? Should we look for miraculous accounts in the Bible or in another place? The reply to such inquiry is that there is actually a miracle currently at our disposal. If we open our hearts and look at it through the eye of the intellect, we will realize that there is a great extant miracle and we will come to believe in the presenter of this miracle, the Prophet Mu®ammad (®), and if we already have faith in him, that faith will be strengthened.

#### The Qur'an as the eternal miracle

The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam and the foundation of Islamic teachings. Its letters, words, phrases, and sounds are all sacred and respected deeply by Muslims. Contrary to the case of the Bible, historically the Qur'an is totally within our sight and its history is as clear as limpid water. We even know which verse has been revealed on which occasion. In this regard, Muslims have written books which are called *asb b an-nuz [I]* [occasions of revelation].

The Muslims' belief in the Qur'an is basically different from what is usually said about the Christians' belief in the Bible. For Muslims, every word of the Qur'an is God's Word while for most Christians the Bible is an interpretation of the religious experience of Jesus ('a) which is necessarily affected by the people's culture and language, and its words are not exactly the words as revealed from God. According to His Will, God chose the Arabic language for the guidance of mankind during the last period of prophethood:

"Alif, L®m, R®. These are the signs of the Manifest Book. Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason."20

The source of all Islamic sciences—ranging from scholastic theology  $[kal \ m]$  and philosophy [falsafah] through jurisprudence [fiqh], law  $[\ uq \ q]$  and ethics  $[akhl \ q]$ —is the Qur'anic verses. The Qur'an is available to us in the same form it was revealed to the first Muslims, and it has remained safe from any sort of distortion  $[ta \ ref]$ . This is based on the promise made by God to protect it:

# ﴾ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذَّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿

#### "Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it."21

In order to clarify the miracle of the Qur'an, three points must be settled: (1) its extraordinariness, (2) its proof of the Prophet's (1) claim, and (3) the failure of people in discrediting it. The extraordinariness of the Qur'an can be shown in a variety of ways: it is a miracle of means, a miracle of expression and a miracle of meaning.

1. A miracle of means: There is no doubt that the receiver of the Qur'an was a common man. His name was never heard among the scholars and men of letters of his time. He was Musammad ibn 'Abdullsh (s), grandson of 'Abd Mansf, the chief of Quraysh, who was born in Mecca. For forty years he was with the people, he had never recited anything similar to what he recited after the age of forty when he was appointed as a prophet. His moral conduct and trustworthiness were known to everyone but he had no prior talent in composing words of wisdom, and he knew neither how to read nor how to write. The Qur'an describes him as "uninstructed" [umms]:

"So have faith in Allah and His Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, who has faith in Allah and His words, and follow him so that you may be guided."22

Not only was the Prophet (1) himself *umm* but also in Mecca, where he came from, knowledge and learning were not prevalent. Arts were only expressed to glorify man's bestial inclinations. Poets recited either lovely poems to incite sensual desires or epic songs to incite anger and vengeance. Given such societal conditions, there is no doubt that only through uncommon means was it possible for the prophet to recite such extraordinary words. If the Qur'anic verses were a product of his own thinking and upbringing, at least some years earlier, words similar to the Qur'an should have been heard from him.

Not only was the Prophet's (⑤) receipt of the Qur'an extraordinary but in essence the revelation of the Qur'an in such a state of affairs that existed in the ⑥ij⑥z was also unusual and beyond expectation. The striking difference between the meaning and elegance of the expression of the Qur'an with the literary and scholarly works of those days was so evident that at one glance it could be discerned by every observer. The opponents of the Apostle (⑥) were also aware of this fact, and thus, they were not saying, "These words are senseless or beyond methodical eloquence and fluency," or "They are just similar to other Arabic literary works." They were rather saying: "These words must not have come from Mu⑤ammad; he must have learned them from someone else," or "He is practicing magic," or "He is possessed by the *jinn* [majn⑥n]."23 In the midst of these calumnies and allegations, an elegant acknowledgment and profound confession of the extraordinariness of the Qur'an is self–evident. In a beautiful expression in the Qur'an, we are told that if we doubt the divine origin of the Qur'an, we should

look for another person like Mu\(\mathbb{I}\) who could compose similar words:

"And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a sirah like it, and invoke your helpers besides Allah, should you be truthful."24

However, you cannot do so. In fact, even if all humans join together and help one another in whatever way possible, still they cannot do so:

"Say, 'Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another." 25

2. A miracle of expression: The Qur'an is the peak of eloquence and fluency. That is, as acknowledged by great scholars of language, it conveys intended meanings through elegant and lucid expressions. The Arabs who used to hear Qur'anic verses during that time were acquainted with literary styles and methods of expression. The revelation of the Qur'an with such eloquence and fluency to a people who used to regard themselves as the masters of expression was a great challenge and it can be guessed what a revolution it brought in the literary circles of the day. They did everything they could, but they failed to keep secret their true feelings about the beauty of the Qur'an, and on many occasions they would recite verses of the Qur'an in private.

The orators and poets of the pre-Islamic period of ignorance [j\mathbb{T}hiliyyah] who had truly surpassed the men of letters of the previous periods in eloquence and fluency became so helpless in facing the astounding elegance of the Qur'an that they had no option but to accuse the Prophet (\mathbb{T}) of practicing magic and call him a powerful sorcerer who dazzles the eyes and controls the hearts of people.

The Qur'an has special styles of expression which are neither common poetry nor prose. Its fluency and eloquence lie in the elegance of expressions and the use of parables. The elegance of poetry lies in its imaginativeness. Usually, the farther it is from reality, the sweeter it becomes to human taste. However, the Qur'an is devoid of the kind of whimsical and fallacious analogies prevalent in poetry. In spite of this, its elegance is captivating. How is it possible to speak elegantly, and at the same time, avoid any naïve simile and scenario–making? Who could create such elegance in speech without taking advantage of the strength of human imagination?

Even though we do not fathom the profundity of the eloquence and fluency of the Qur'an, we can sense its beauty and divinity. When we compare the sayings of Im fm 'Al ('a), who was the master of oration and whose words are the peak of eloquence [nahj al-bal ghah] 26, with a Qur'anic verse the beauty of

the former compared to the latter is as the bezel to the gemstone.

The beauty of the Qur'an is not confined to the eloquence and fluency of its expression. In fact, the soothing melody of its sounds is also a manifestation of its miracle. The Qur'an has been essentially revealed in oral form. That is, it was made known in the form of sounds which later came out in written form. For this reason, it has an astounding harmony and its recitation is soothing to the ears and attractive to the hearts.

Beauty always pertains to the feelings, but there are diverse feelings. Beautiful love poetry incites the carnal feelings of man while an epic song stirs his sense of bravery. However, the Qur'an awakens the spiritual feelings in humanity. Its magnificence brings a person to the sublime world of spirituality, wipes the dust off his God–seeking nature [firah], and shows the sublime countenance of the divine spirit embedded in every individual.

3. A miracle of meaning: The Qur'an is a book of guidance and a luminous torch to the way of salvation. It teaches man everything he needs to know to attain felicity both in this world and the hereafter. That which is usually expected from such book is a set of programs and instructions, and not the discovery of the realities of existence. However, the technique of the Qur'an is to introduce essential instructions and injunctions through the unveiling of fundamental realities of the universe.

According to the Qur'an, the felicity of man cannot be attained without passing through the realities of life. For this reason, knowing God is the most essential reality of life, faith in the angels is an important reality in the field of action, and cognition of many other fundamental realities are all elements of man's felicity. Based on the approaches of the Qur'an, it is only through knowledge and faith in the realities of existence that the felicity of man can be ensured. The topics of the Qur'an in introducing God, who is the Origin and Source of creation, are nature (which is the life domain of humanity), the hereafter (which is the final destination of life) and human beings themselves (who are the wayfarers in the path of salvation).

Regarding God, the human intellect cannot describe Him beyond a specified point: He is the One and Only God, who knows every particle in the universe; the overall Sovereign. The important point here is that it is the Qur'an that introduces God as far as it is comprehendible for man.

While having no similitude whatsoever to any of His creatures, the God of the Qur'an 27 is so close to man that He can hear his whisper:

"Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." 28

Contrary to the God of philosophers, 29 the God of the Qur'an gives attention to the world of humans. As such, man can seek His assistance and rely on Him. The Qur'an has many descriptions of the agents of Divine Action, i.e. the angels, which the human intellect cannot conceive of.

If man has taken some steps in the valley of knowing God through his deductive reasoning, he has nothing to say in the realm of unraveling the realities of his destination, such as the purgatorial world ['Ilam al-barzakh] and the Resurrection. This is while a considerable portion of the Qur'an, i.e. almost one-third, describes such fundamental realities in an elegant and pleasant, yet alarming, manner. How could these concepts and meanings, which become clearer to man with his intellectual growth, be a product of his mind?

Regarding the natural world in which we presently live, there are interesting passages in the Qur'an many of which are in conformity with the recent findings in natural sciences.

Moreover, a large part of the Qur'an deals with moral and juristic programs which have no parallel. Qur'anic ethics is not alien to the real life of humanity. In fact, it has been organized with the nature and limitations of human beings in mind. God knows that morality is observed only when it is inculcated in one's mind that he shall enjoy everlasting benefit from behaving morally. People render sacrifice and give preference to others to enjoy worldly benefits only when they know that by doing so, they shall obtain everlasting favor like admission to paradise or winning the pleasure of God. This important point is remarkably stressed in the moral training and edification of the Qur'an. Whenever the Qur'an invites a person to help others, it says:

"Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan that He may multiply it for him several fold? And Allah tightens and expands [the means of life], and to Him you shall be brought back."30

God considers giving a loan to others the same as giving a loan to oneself because the benefits will always return to the giver. This point has been stated in the Qur'an many times. Is there any stronger motivation for doing good deeds? For anyone who reads the verses of the Qur'an and understands their meaning, his conscience will be awakened and he will be encouraged to do good deeds.

In the field of law and jurisprudence, the case is the same. The evidence of the greatness and merit of Qur'anic-based jurisprudence is the testimony of thousands of scholars for centuries in its solution to various legal problems.

In addition, notwithstanding the challenges to the Qur'an and strong motives of the enemies of Islam to discredit it, throughout history no one has been able to produce a verse even similar to the verses of the Qur'an. Thus, the miraculous elements of the Qur'an are all-encompassing and there is no doubt that it is a miracle. Because the Qur'an is an eternal miracle that captivates the hearts of all people, then Islam

must also be a religion for all times because the Qur'an is the holy book of Islam.

# Finality of prophethood

"Are you not satisfied that you are to me as H⊡r⊡n (Aaron) is to M⊡s⊡ (Moses) except that there will be no prophet after me?"31

This and similar narrations [riw y t] have been recorded in Sunn and Sh that sources without a broken chain of narrators [taw tur] and thus there is no doubt about its authenticity [viah]. More important than these narrations are the implicit, and at times explicit, verses of the Qur'an regarding this:

"Musammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets, and Allah has knowledge of all things."33

The Qur'an, which is the book of Islam, has been sent down for all people not just those who were present at the time of its revelation. This implies that everyone must put his hopes in the Qur'an for salvation. More explicit than this, however, are verses which indicate that Islam is the religion of God in its complete and final form and thus there is no need for the coming of another prophet:

"Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion."34

Kh tam literally means seal with which a letter or message is usually ended. The Prophet Mu ammad (), as the kh tam, signifies that the series of prophets ends with him. Therefore, there is no doubt that one of the pillars of the religion of Islam is the finality of prophethood [kh tamiyyah] in which Muslims must believe.

However, why has the prophethood ended? Will the reasons behind the sending of prophets not be

#### repeated again?

In reply to these questions, Muslims scholars have different views, one of which is as follows:35

In theoretically analyzing the reason behind the finality of prophethood in Islam, firstly the intellectual and spiritual condition of the previous communities of people must be compared with that of the later communities after the apostleship of the Prophet Mu\u00edammad (\u00edd). Reflecting on the collective life of humankind leads us to the point that just as the there are different stages—for example, sometimes humans are in the stage of childhood and the world of fantasy and at times in the stage of adulthood and intellectual maturity—humankind as a whole has also passed through different stages.

The period of immaturity had passed and around the advent of Islam humans had entered a period of adulthood and maturity. The difference between the two periods is manifested in various forms. During the initial stages, humans were like children who were in need of constant care and supervision. Prophets ('a) used to come in succession so as to constantly lead the people to the way of salvation, and assist them in every circumstance so that they would be able to identify their duties and act upon them. However, the people of today—who are the addressees of Islam—have reached such a stage of understanding and maturity that given their spiritual and material assets they can identify their duties more readily and follow the path of salvation.

The teachings of Islam, which according to the Ahl al–Sunnah are derived from the Qur'an and the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (1), and according to the Sh1 are derived from the sayings of the infallible Im1 (1) as well, are at the disposal of all people so that they can easily tread their chosen path.

The concept of *ijtih* d, which means deduction of laws from the sources of Islam, has immense importance here for it is by means of *ijtih* d that Islam responds to the new and unprecedented needs of mankind. It must be noted that the *mujtahid* does not bring in any new decree that contradicts the finality of Islam. What he does is whenever he encounters a new issue whose ruling is not explicitly stated in the religious texts, he deduces its ruling by using the sources of Islam—including the Qur'an and the definite and organized or codified system (principles of jurisprudence [usel al-fiqh]) and relays the ruling, suitably deduced, to others.

Therefore, it can be said that the development and maturity of humanity at the present period was the reason God presented His religion in its final and complete form. At his present level of development, whenever humankind encounters a new issue, the level of maturity is available to deduce the correct way and avoid misguidance. The maturity and keenness of the people at the present age make them different from their predecessors who did not recognize the worth and value of their sacred scriptures and distorted them.

One of the reasons behind the continuity of prophethood before was the distortions mankind made to the previous holy books, turning them from books of guidance into common story books and even using

them as a source of misguidance for others. Today, however, after many centuries mankind has neither added nor omitted a word or even a letter from the Qur'an and, as God has promised, it has remained safe from any distortion whatsoever.

Moreover, the power of reasoning and intellectual capacity of humanity at the period of the apostleship of the Prophet Musammad (s) was such that God provided everything humans needed about the fundamental realities of existence. That is, whatever is necessary for the guidance and salvation of humankind to the end of time has been mentioned in the Qur'an.

Understanding and acquisition of knowledge are closely related to one's aptitude and readiness. God, who knows that humankind at the present time is at the peak of readiness to grasp such truths, taught it whatever is necessary and feasible. Of course, it is clear that the readiness of humanity to acquire knowledge and information about the world of nature and the secrets of creation that make them capable of dominating nature is always on the rise, but this is beside the point.

The Qur'an is meant to state the facts essential for the *salvation* of all people and so it has not abandoned anything in this regard. As such, the advancement in natural sciences, mathematics and even philosophy do not change the teachings of Islam, and scientific and technological progress do not bring about the need for a new prophet, because prophetic knowledge is related to the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

In addition, the moral values of religion are also eternal and must be given attention and acted upon in all aspects of life. If a civilization demands that lying must be the basis of action, one should not submit to it on the pretext that the exigency of time demands it. One must rather doubt the foundation of such a civilization and *always* rely upon the firm foundation of religious morality. However, some things that may undermine religion in modern times are changes in legal relations. Modern life has raised new issues but, as we have said, the solution to these kinds of problems is the method of *ijtih* sd.

Given this concise explanation, it is clear that the present human is not in need of a new prophet and of course God was aware of this fact before and more than any person. Now, fourteen centuries have passed since the advent of Islam, and no new religion or new prophet has come. This is in spite of the fact that usually the time interval between two prophets had been very short and sometimes there had even been numerous prophets present at the same time. This itself is a living testimony that the door of revelation is closed and the criterion for salvation embedded in the Islamic sources, i.e. the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Hence, the complete proof or argument [sujjah] of God has been disclosed to all who open their ears, eyes, and hearts to the truth.

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1. - Serah Yenus 10:2.
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2. - STrah Qanan 28:7.

3. - STrah NaTl 16:68.

4. - Srah Zalzalah 99:4-5.

5. - STrah Nist' 4:163.

- 6. STrah Qatat 28:86.
- 7. Sirah Najm 53:4-5.
- 8. Strah IT HT 20:114.
- 9. Serah 'Ankabet 29:48.
- 10. STrah Tqqah 69:43-48.
- 11. Sirah Ta Ha 20:133.
- 12. Strah Mu'mintn 23:45.
- 13. Exodus 14:21–22. In this volume, the translation of biblical passages is adapted from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible (Colorado: International Bible Society, 1984). [Trans.]
- 14. Serah A'ref 7:106-108.
- 15. Sirah Qamar 54: 1-2.
- 16. See Mussin Jawede, Daremade bar Khudeshinese Falsafe [An Introduction to Philosophical Theology] (n.p. n.d.).
- 17. STrah Anbiy 21:69.
- 18. Take for example the medical treatment of Amer Semene by Ibn Sene. See Mueahhare, Nubuwwat, p. 160.
- 19. For information about this ruling and its application, see Ghullm-Mulsin Ibreheme Daynene, Qawe'id-e Kulli-ye Falsafe dar Falsafe-ye Isleme [General Philosophical Rules in Islamic Philosophy], vol. 1, p. 208.
- 20. STrah YTsuf 12:1-2.
- 21. Sirah ijr 15:9.
- 22. STrah A'r f 7:158.
- 23. Majn®n means that a person has connection with the jinn. The Arabs believed that the jinn could teach man and thus, they regarded the Qur'an as taught by the jinn!
- 24. Sirah Baqarah 2:23.
- 25. STrah IsrT' (or Bant IsrT'TI) 17:88.
- 26. Nahj al-Balghah (Tubt Telit), Sermon 233, p. 354.
- 27. That is, God as described in the Qur'an. [Trans.]
- 28. STrah QTf 50:16.
- 29. That is, God as usually described in philosophy by philosophers. [Trans.]
- 30. Sirah Bagarah 2:245.
- 31. STrah Ibn Hishem, vol. 2, p. 520; Ibn Tajar (al-'Asqalene), At-Tawe'iq al-Mueriqah (Egypt, 2nd Edition), Book 9, Chapter 2, p. 121. [Trans.]
- <u>32.</u> By taw®tur is meant the multiplicity of the sources of a certain report that leads to certitude in the listener that the report is indeed true. A mutaw®tir had®th is one which has been reported by so many different chains of transmission and such a number of narrators in every generation that normally one could not fabricate such a tradition without the fact of its fabrication becoming known. [Trans.]
- 33. Sīrah Aīzīb 33:40.
- 34. STrah MT'idah 5:3.
- 35. The following view is extracted from the works of <code>Tyatull</code> Murta Mulahhar, Khatm-e Nubuwwat [Finality of Prophethood] in his compendium of works, vol. 3, p. 151.
- 36. Mujtahid: one who exercises or practices ijtih d. [Trans.]

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