

[Home](#) > [Teach Yourself Islamic Ideology](#) > [Lesson 10: Another Look at Prophethood based on Monotheism](#) > Questions to ask yourself

Lesson 10: Another Look at Prophethood based on Monotheism

In our discussion of the Divine Qualities, we came to know that God is the Absolute Aware, Wise and Compassionate. Now we ask, would this God Who has these qualities, leave humanity to itself? Is it possible that He not distinguish truth from falsehood for them? Is it possible that in this area He has withheld his Divine Grace?

It is clear that such a thing is not possible because such a thing disagrees with the Creator being Aware and Wise and also with His being Absolute.

Now this question arises, "Who is that leader?" Perhaps some people will say, "The leader or guide is that very intellect of the human being." Now without any erroneous orientation or prejudice we will answer this question.

There is no doubt about the fact that the intellect does play a role as a guide for human beings. The greatest distinction between animals and human beings is this very intellect. Cogitation and thought which bring consciousness are greatly emphasized and we discussed this to a certain extent in our lesson on humanology. That which must be studied is whether or not the intellect acting alone can guide us to the final stage of perfection. In other words, is the intellect self-sufficient?

All of our words relate to this issue. If it be proven that the intellect is self sufficient, the necessity for prophethood will naturally be negated and if self-sufficiency be negated and the intellect be proven to be imperfect, taking monotheism into consideration, the acceptance of prophethood will be necessary.

Is the intellect self-sufficient as a guide? Now it is vital that we explain what we mean by self-sufficiency.

What is meant by self-sufficiency as previously indicated is, whether or not the intellect alone is capable of guiding the human being towards the final stage of perfection and answer all of the issues which play

a role in bringing the human being to well-being?

This is the point for otherwise it is very clear that the thought that the intellect is not self-sufficient in reaching conclusions about scientific evidence is not true. The evolutionary movement of the human being towards perfection begins with the intellect. Scholars accept the need for prophethood here and they clearly say that the way to reach monotheism, which is the infra-structure of prophethood, is possible through the intellect. Prophethood itself is proven by the intellect's ability to reach conclusions.

Now that the limits of the discussion have become clearer, we will turn to the main issue and that is whether or not the intellect is self-sufficient.

In order that this discussion not becomes too lengthy, we are obliged to state the following: The intellect can never be self-sufficient and this point has been proven in practice. It is sufficient if you look at the various views of the schools of thought and the contradictions which exist. If the intellect were self-sufficient, then why all these differences of opinion? What are they for?

One of the important issues in a group becoming Sophists is because of this very confusion which exists whereby every member of a school of thought claims, "My ideas relate to intellectual precepts."

It is here that the materialists come and say, "The human being is a creature who is lost," or, "The human being is a creature who has been left to itself," or, "The human being is a creature who is alone."

A book is required in order to discuss all of these. Thus we will end the discussion here and we will turn to that which the very nature of the human being (who has not deviated) cries out, "Oh human being! You have not repented. Your intellect is weaker than to be able to suffice you. Find faith in a prophet who has united his roots with the Source of existence."

What are prophets like? Here we turn to the word of Martyr Professor Mutahhari. "The prophets are like receivers who have been put to work in the form of human beings." The prophets are outstanding people who have the ability to receive this kind of awareness from the unseen world. The Holy Quran says,

"God knows best where to place His Prophet." (6: 125)

Even though revelation is beyond the areas of sense and experience of humanity but this power like many other powers which can be recognized from the traces which remain of them. Divine revelation leaves wonderful effects upon the person who has received the revelation, that is, the person of a prophet. It 'actualizes' him. That is, it takes his powers and creates a deep and great revolution within him. This revolution is oriented towards the betterment, growth and well-being of humanity and it acts in a realistic way. It gives him an unbelievable decisiveness. History has never recorded a decisiveness to equal the decisiveness of the prophets and those who arose from their side or by means of them.

Now that we have seen the philosophical necessity for a prophet and we have come to know what kind of persons prophets are, with a bit of care, we will come to know that the prophets must contain

characteristics which can be described as the following;

Immunity from sin: That is to be free from sin and error. A prophet should not be under the domination or his own egotistical desires and then sin and, in his work, not err.

It is possible that God send a prophet to guide humanity whose words and deeds one cannot rely upon? It is clear that the answer is negative. What is necessary to be contained by a prophet in order for him to be trusted? Freedom from sin and error which then brings the highest form of trust and credibility and this is immunity or immaculateness.

Miracles: What are the real signs of the invitation of a prophet and proof that his words are from heaven? Is proof necessary? It is clear that it is necessary and that tool is several deeds which are beyond the power of humanity (bringing miracles).

Leadership: Prophets bring the message of God to His creatures and he awakens their powers and brings order to them. He invites them to those qualities which are pleasing to God: Purity, reforming the self, freedom from everything that is other than God, truthfulness, kindness, justice and other qualities which a good morality contains. He frees humanity from the chains of obeying egotistical desires, obeying various idols and those who rebel against God's Commands.

Thus the leadership of humanity and bringing order to human powers and inspiring them to movement towards that which is pleasing to God and reformation of humanity requires the bringing of a prophet.

Sincerity of intention: As prophets rely solely upon God and never forget that God has given His message to them to deliver and that they do His work, they have the greatest amount of sincerity in themselves. That is, they have no goal other than to guide humanity which is the desire of God. This is why they seek no reward for what they do.

Constructiveness; It is not possible under any circumstances that a prophet move in a direction which will corrupt individuals or destroy human society. Rather, prophets give movement to powers or abilities and bring order. This is only in order to build human beings and society. In other words, moves towards the well-being of humanity. Thus if the effects of an invitation of a pretentious prophet are to corrupt human beings, turn aside their powers or bring destruction to them or their society and be a cause for the decline of humanity, these are the very decisive proof of his pretentiousness and lack of sincerity in his invitation.

Struggle: It is impossible that a real prophet bring something in his message which is doubtful or that he put his efforts towards helping an oppressor and confirming oppression and injustice or remain silent before multi-theism, ignorance, superstitions and oppression and not struggle against them.

Of course, struggle does not solely mean armed struggle. Rather, struggle takes many forms. A prophet, taking the conditions of the times in to consideration, struggled in appropriate ways.

Monotheism, decisively following the intellect and justice are among the principles of the invitation of all prophets. The invitation of individuals who invite in this way is in and of itself worthy of study. It is a miracle. Thus if persons in their message expressed ideas which oppose monotheism or something which opposed the clear and decisive rules of the intellect or justice and confirm oppression, their message is not worthy of study.

Finally, in conclusion, we should turn our attention to this fact that prophets, despite of all of the outstanding qualities which they contain like bringing miracles, immunity from sin and error, leadership, they are of the human species. That is they contain all the necessities of humanity.

A prophet never forgot his duties. More than any other person, they feared God and more than any other, they worshipped God.

The difference between a prophet and others is only in the area of revelation and the preparatory stages and necessity for revelation. Revelation does not remove prophets from humanity. Rather they are models for the perfect human being. This is why they become leaders for people.

The Continuation of the Message of the Prophets in Imamate

It is the belief of all Muslims that Muhammad, peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants, is the Seal of Prophets. The kindness and generosity of the prophets with the perfection of his existence ends. With his death, the world of humanity ends its relationship with Divine revelation. After him no prophet will come.

Based upon this principle of faith, all of that which is necessary for humanity to receive through Divine revelation was revealed to him and the Holy Quran is the last of the heavenly books.

But as the Prophet, in addition to his expressing the revelation, he also held the position of leadership of human society and the interpretation of Divine revelation with the support of his immunity from sin and error which God gave him. After him, the need for an aware leader who does not sin or err, as Divine proof, remained because the thoughts of human beings err, are impressionable and imperfect.

The belief of the Shi'ites in the system of imamate stems from this very necessity. They believe in the clear words of the Holy Prophet who said that the continuation of the way of the prophets to be through the 12 leaders, immune from sin and error, based upon God's Command, who are determined and introduced as those who continue the way of the Prophet.

This is that very ideal plan of the Shi'ites who believe the leadership of human society should be through the most aware and purest of human beings who God, through the direct words of the Prophet, guaranteed will be free from accepting impressions and committing error.

Of course, during the time when the immune Imam is in occultation, a leader or leaders of Islamic

society will be chosen from among those who best contain the criteria of the determined framework of knowledge, guarding the self (against evil), justice, etc. This is the principle of 'leadership of the religious jurist' which is the best and closest form of leadership to the above system during the time when the infallible imam is in occultation. It is the only way which will prevent deviation and the domination of an individual and individual rule within a society.

Summary of the Lesson

1. As God is the Aware, Wise and Absolute Grace, it is impossible that He not give a leader to humanity.
2. The intellect is a guide but is never sufficient to act alone.
3. The clearest reason for the non self-sufficiency of the intellect is the existence of various schools of thought, philosophies, politics and religions who the followers of each believe to be the right one.
4. The prophets are like receivers who have been put to work in the form of humanity.
5. The particularities of the prophets are the following: immunity from sin, miracles, leadership, and sincerity of intention, constructiveness and struggle.
6. Prophets by having all of these qualities are, at the same time, human beings who have, in the shadow of revelation, become the perfect model for humanity. This is why they become the leader of others.
7. With attention to the imperfection of humanity like erring and being impressionable, the best way to guide society is to give the leadership to an aware person who is immune from sin and this is the system of the imamate.

Questions to ask yourself

1. Why have you accepted the principle of leadership?
2. What do we mean when we say the intellect is self-sufficient?
3. Describe the characteristics of the prophets and explain each one.
4. How is the system of imamate the continuation of prophethood?
5. What is the leadership of the religious jurist?

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