

Lesson 15: Prophets and Human Guidance

What is man created for?

Did God create man as part of the chain of reproduction, to be a cog in a machine, and to be counted only as an automaton? Was man created only for his own enjoyment? Was he created only to amass as much wealth as possible through any means, direct or devious, so as to satisfy his material wants? Is there no greater idea behind His creation?

A large number of people regard only man's material aspect and neglect the other side of the coin, because they have not understood the profundity of the nature of man, or because they have not correctly evaluated it. Men of great understanding have ascribed three dimensions to man:

1. Individual material life.
2. Social life.
3. The world of the spirit and insight.

Those who give importance only to the first dimension, and believe in absolute freedom for man, even though it be harmful for him, overlook the profound character of man and they have forgotten the other two important dimensions. Those who lend importance to the first and second dimensions, but neglect the third only succeed in creating an environment, which lacks spiritual and moral values.

Arnold Toynbee the great British historian, in a long interview with the American magazine, 'Life', said that man had submitted himself to materialism, and that from that point of view we do not lack anything. However, he said, we have become bankrupt on the spiritual side of things. However, I think there is still time, he continued, to leave this incorrect view of things and return to religion.

So, a serious investigator goes further than the first two dimensions, and looks at and studies man and the aim of creation from all three dimensions. Because the reality of man is thus, and man cannot be known in himself in any other way than this. Moreover, the third dimension gives man the power to evaluate his entrances and exits on the stage of personal and social life. This is the correct way of living.

Man must reach his perfection by making his way through various dimensions, and he must find this way, for he is created for this purpose.

The question now arises of whether one's conscience can lead one through these dimensions. Let us begin to analyse this problem with a view to finding an answer.

Conscience

Some psychologists deny the existence of conscience. They believe that what is called conscience is really only the result of early childhood training. On the other hand many scholars, like Rousseau, believe that there is a power hidden in the depths of man's nature which can distinguish good from bad. Children who are not under the influence of an environment, which trains them in a certain way, whose conscience has not been perverted, can understand good and bad, basically and instinctively. [1](#)

We can agree that a part of good and evil is according to custom; for example, dress, food and such things, which may be good at one time and place and bad in others. But the intelligent and reasonable are governed by thinking and cannot accept that all goods and evil are like this, because trust, fulfilment of obligation, help for the poor and the weak, work for humanity, brotherhood, equality and so on have deep roots in the nature of man. On the other hand deception, injustice, breaking agreements, selfishness and the like have always and in all places been condemned. One cannot, therefore, say that they came to be regarded as instinctively bad.

One must therefore accept the existence of conscience, but with the following necessary condition: that conscience, by itself, cannot guide man completely – it needs training. It must, like minerals in the grounds, be extracted and refined. Otherwise, it may be perverted under the influence of a corrupt environment, with the result that these psychologists cannot recognise it and therefore deny its existence. This is an indication that man needs infallible prophets.

Human Ideologies

From early times up to now, man has been putting forward many ideas for the improvement of society and the individuals who it comprises. But because man is not completely aware of the secrets of spiritual and material well-being, and his ignorance is very great, he has never been able to put forward any ideas which have been able to satisfy the full requirements of human nature.

Dr. Burrows said some years ago that at Princeton he heard Einstein say that science tells us what is there, but religion tells us what should be there, and Victor Hugo said that as much as man progresses, his need for religion becomes greater.

Another difficulty with such ideologies is that whatever intelligence tells us, however right it may be, no guarantee can be made that we will follow its ideas. Many people know through their intelligence and

knowledge that gambling, alcohol, stealing and crime are not good, but nevertheless they fall victims to such practices.

Today we see that the United Nations, with over 130 members from countries all over the world, is a weak body whose resolutions generally remain merely in their minutes and only on paper. This is because intelligence and knowledge are no guarantee for action.

But the Divine scheme, because it comes from an unlimited source of knowledge, can have no room for error, and because it issues forth from the immaculate hearts of the prophets, it has influence on mankind. Moreover, the reward and punishment for not carrying out His instruction causes man to implement this scheme. Alone, intelligence and thinking is not enough; a confirmation must be found through Divine assistance. These faculties are only, fields for training through the Divine discipline of the messengers so that man may reach felicity without being diverted.

Imam Ali (A.S.), in the first sermon in Nahj al-balagha explains the reason for the sending of messengers thus:

Then Allah sent His messengers and the series of His prophets to them (mankind) to make them fulfil 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.

However, supposing that man has a correct ideology, do the dictators and those who wish to enforce their own ideas allow us to distinguish the true from the false? Don't they rather try to cover the true face of ideologies? In this way people, through ignorance of correct beliefs, do not rise up against oppression and are successfully deceived. However, a law that comes from God However, a law that comes from God can be made known to all through the miracles and signs of truth which God gives to His messengers, and people can understand its truthfulness and believe in it, and will then be unable to find any excuse for disobedience.

The necessity for the sending of Messengers

- a) The personal, social and spiritual perfection of man is one of the aims of creation.
- b) Conscience alone is not enough for the true perfection of man.
- c) Human ideologies cannot completely satisfy all the demands of man's nature, and there is no guarantee for their implementation.
- d) Prophets have been sent and their prophet hoods proved through miracles so that man distinguish the truth and no-one can excuse his disobedience by saying that he could not find the truth.

Through these four points, we discover that the prophets are necessary for the perfection of man, and

that they were sent to inform man of what he requires in the way of perfection, so that they may tread the path of happiness. One cannot imagine that the Wise God could leave man without instructions, laws and obligations, or that He could leave them in the hands of tyrants, so that they might be the victims of human and be prevented from reaching perfection.

Ibn Sina wrote in 'ash-Shifa':

More necessary for the continued existence of man and his essential perfection than even the growth of eyelashes and eyebrows and the concavity of the soles of the feet is the sending of prophets by Allah.

Thus, in arriving to the aim of creation and to spiritual and material perfection, God must have sent some people as messengers, as indeed we see that he has, so that they might guide people by the radiant torch of revelation.

A tradition is related by Hisham ibn al-Hakam that:

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, in answering an atheist who had inquired about the need for the sending of prophets, said: "When we have shown that there is a Creator Who fashioned us and Who is above us and all of His creation, and that this Creator is Wise and Elevated in the sense that He did not allow His creatures to see or touch Him, so that He might be together with them, and they might be together with Him, and that He might argue with them and they might argue with Him, then it becomes clear that He has emissaries in His creation so that they can speak from His Presence to His creatures and servants, and they might guide them to their advantage and benefit and to that in which is their continued existence and in the absence of which is their extinction. So it has become evident that there are some who command and prohibit on behalf of the Wise, the Knowing to His creation, and who speak from His Glorified Presence, and these are the prophets, and His chosen from among creation wise and trained through wisdom, and raised in it.

They are apart from man in all their conditions – in spite of sharing with him in his form and fashioning they are sustained in wisdom by the Wise, the Knowing. Then the above is evident in every epoch and in which the messengers and prophets brought evidence and proofs so that the earth of Allah might not be deprived of a witness with whom there is a sign which refers to His Truthfulness and Righteousness."[2](#)

Of course, Divine plans are not concerted on only one level. Rather they guide us from all direction. Worship, government, justice, economy, power, individual and social duties and also the general law which governs individual problems. All of these are the aims of religions and they enable man to perfect himself in all the three dimensions of his nature.

Again Divine plans do not restrict themselves to one class of society, but encompass all levels of society and uphold the rights of all people, so those who think that religion was invented by the ruling or wealthy class, and that it was invented in feudal and capitalist societies to serve the purposes of these societies

are clearly wrong, because these people have not paid proper attention to the foundation of religion.

In addition to this, history bears witness that the upper and wealthy classes did not participate in the movements led by the prophets, and Divine religions always opposed the oppression and transgressions of feudalistic and capitalists.

Leaders, scholars, the simple and the poor, and others, all come to religion because only by its clear objectives can they satisfy the demands of their natures and emotions, and they realize that only religion can guide them to real perfection. This is the only reason why man turn to religion.

Fortunately, today, educated people are more aware of the value of religion, and they believe that real peace and perfection can only be had in the shade of religion and belief in God.

The Necessity for Miracles

After man has realised that he needs the guidance of prophets in order to reach an all-embracing happiness, and that he can only construct the glorious edifice of perfection through their instructions, he naturally feels affection for those teachers who work for his benefit and sacrifice their sinless souls for his advantage. Thus belief comes to reach such a degree that people do not spare themselves any hardship in order to advance the aims of the prophets, and they prefer the demands of the prophets to the demands of their own souls.

But this deep-rooted and comprehensive influence and importance of the prophets, and the love and belief of people in them cause some ambitious persons to take advantage of them, seeking to become influential and obtain their desires by claiming prophet

So, if someone claims prophet hood and people gather round him, one cannot believe in him without some investigation. For it is possible that he falsely proclaims prophet hood, as many people have done up to the present day and thus collect a following in order to find out if someone is a genuine prophet, this latter must bring some evidence with him so that people can be sure of him and accept his claim. Thus the real prophets can be distinguished from the false.

This evidence that distinguishes the true prophets from the false is known as miracles, and God gave miracles to His prophets and messengers so that people could be saved from mistakes and the dangers of those who seek to deceive them, and so that the face of truth may never be hidden from people. So far we have seen that messengers must bring miracles so that people can know that they bear a message from God, and that what they say is true, and so that they may be completely obedient to them and follow their teachings with faith and conviction.

What are Miracles?

Miracles (mu'jizah) are what the prophets did according to the Will of God in order to affirm the prophet hood they claimed, and which others are unable to copy.

Miracles are only a Proof of Prophethood

A group of those who sought excuses for their lack of faith demanded various things as miracles, not through a desire to have the prophet hood confirmed, but in order to oppose the prophets. They even asked for things that were logically impossible.

However, because the prophets brought enough miracles they did not accede to these demands and told these people that the position of a prophet is to guide, to bring good tidings and to warn. This is why miracles are according to the Will of God and in situations where they are necessary, as is mentioned in the Qur'an with reference to such people:

The signs are only with Allah. And I am only a plain Warner. (29:50)

It was not for any Messenger to bring a sign, save by Allah's leave. (40: 78)

Questions

1. Is man created for his enjoyment, or to accumulate wealth, or just for reproduction?
2. What kind of people neglect the more important aspect of life?
3. Who said we must return to religion and why?
4. What are the three dimensions of life?
5. Can working just for one of these dimensions make people happy?
6. What power in man distinguishes in between good and evil?
7. Is conscience due to childhood training?
8. What does Rousseau say about conscienceless?
9. Are all that considered good all the time?
10. Can you name three of the values that due not change?
11. Can the power of conscience identify all that is good and evil?

12. Why do we need infallible prophets?
13. Has man been able to put forward an idea that could satisfy all the requirements of human nature?
14. According to Einstein what branch of knowledge answers the question of what is there?
15. What science answers the question of what should be there?
16. What happens to the resolution of the UN?
17. Why is the Divine instruction of greater influence on man?
18. What is the reason for sending prophets according to Imam Ali?
19. What facts prove the truthfulness of prophets?
20. What are the reasons that necessitate the sending of Divine Messengers?*
21. What do miracles do?
22. Which four points through that we need Prophets for from God?
23. What kind of comparison has Ibn Sina made about the need for prophets?
24. What reason has Imam Al-Sadiq has given in support for the need of prophets?
25. Why are miracles needed?
26. What is a miracle?

1. See Rousseau's Emile, especially Book IV

2. Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-Hujjah

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