

Lesson 32: The Philosophy of the Existence of Imams (Guides)

The discussion which we had about the necessity for sending of the Holy Prophet by God, makes us familiar, to a certain extent, with the necessity for the existence of an Imam after the Prophet because in many of the important issues, they hold things in common, but here it is important to mention other reasons, as well.

1. Spiritual Perfection along with Divine Leadership

Before anything else, we must seek out the goal for the creation of human beings which is the highest creature of the world of Creation.

They take a way which is long and full of twists and turns towards God, towards Absolute Perfection, towards spiritual perfection in all dimensions.

Without doubt, this way cannot be taken and the goal cannot be attained without the presence of a pure leader and it is not possible to undertake this way without a leader who is a heavenly teacher because: It is a way full of darkness and the dangers of becoming lost.

It is clear that God created the human beings with their own free will and choice and gave them a conscience and a heavenly book and sent his prophets to them but it is possible that the human being, in spite of all of these facilities and possibilities, err upon the way.

Clearly, the presence of an infallible leader will help to prevent the danger of deviation and going astray to a great extent, and in this way, all existence of the Imam is necessary to complete the goal of creation of human beings.

This is that very thing which is called 'the law of kindness'. What is meant by this is that God, the Wise, has seen to all of the affairs of the human being to reach the goal of creation among which is the

sending of the prophets and the selection of pure Imams, otherwise there would be an imperfection in purpose. (Note this carefully).

2. Guardian of the Heavenly Laws

We know that the Divine religions, at the time of their descent to the prophets, are like a drop of rain water, pure, life-giving and nurturing, but the moment one enters an environment which is polluted and brains become weak or impure, gradually they are polluted and superstitions are added to them so that the purity of the first day is lost; in this state, neither do they have attractions, nor any educational effects, nor do they quench the thirst, nor do they blossom forth in flowers of virtue.

It is here that an infallible leader must always act as a guardian of the authenticity of a school, and the being pure of the religious programs alongside it so that they guard against any deviation, extremism, alien ideas and superstitions because if religious precepts be without such a leader, in a very short period of time, they will lose their authenticity and sincerity.

For this reason, 'Ali, peace be upon him, in his Sermon 147 in the Nahj al-Balaghah says, "Yes. The earth will never be empty of a person who has arisen with the proof of God, whether through appearing of being known or being hidden, so that the Divine proof and signs not be falsified."

In truth, the heart of Imam, peace be upon him, is just like a safety deposit box in which important documents are always placed, so that they be preserved against thieves and other accidents and this is another reason for the existence of the Imam.

3. The Political and Social Leadership of the Ummah

Doubtlessly, no social group or gathering can continue to be alive if it is not led by a strong leader. Because of this, from the earliest times to the present, all tribes and nations have selected a leader for themselves who was, sometimes, a good person and very often, not so.

It was often the case that by making use of the needs of the ummah for a leader, a tyrant, who had coercion and who deceived the people, was imposed upon them and he took the power in hand.

On the other hand, in order for human beings to be able to reach spiritual perfection, they must take this way, not alone, but with a group or a society because the power of an individual from the intellectual, physical, material and spiritual point of view, is very limited whereas the power of a group is very strong.

But for a society, it is necessary that a correct system rule over 'it and human talents blossom to struggle against deviations, preserve the rights of all individuals and for reaching this great goal, programming and organization is necessary and the motives be mobilized for motion in a free environment in all of society.

It is a fact that human beings sin. Because of this, human beings have always borne witness to the political deviation of the world. The necessity for a pure leader, sent on behalf of God Almighty to supervise this important issue and, also, making use of the people's power and the great thoughts of scholars, prevents any kind of deviation.

This is another of the philosophies behind the existence of the Imam and another, we repeat, is to be a guide.

Thus the duty of the people at the special times when the pure Imam is in occultation has become clear and, with the will of God, we will speak about it in later lessons.

4. The Necessity of the Final Proof

Not only must the heart be guided by the rays of the existence of the Imam, and follow its way towards absolute perfection, but for those who knowingly and consciously follow the wrong way and who have gone astray, there must be a final proof so that if they are promised a chastisement, it will not be without reason and no one can complain that no one had showed them the way and if they had been shown, they would not have gone astray.

In other words, it is to close the way to excuses that the proof of the truth is given to the necessary extent, and awareness is given to the unaware and to the aware, to gain strength of will power.

5. The Imam is a Great Intermediate for Divine Grace

Many of the scholars — following the Islamic Traditions — compare the existence of the Prophet and the Imam in human society in the total world of Creation to the existence of a heart in the body of the human being.

We know that when the heart beats, blood is sent to all the parts of the body and it nurtures all of the cells of the body.

Because the pure Imam, in the form of a perfect human being and leader of human society, is the cause for the descent of Divine Favor or Grace, and every individual, to the extent of their being in touch with the Prophet, and the Imam, can benefit from this Grace or Favor, and the Imam benefits from this very Grace, it must be said that to the same extent that the existence of the heart is necessary for a human being, the existence of this intermediate for Divine Grace is also necessary for the activities of the world of humanity. (Note this with care).

Let it not be mistaken. The Prophets and Imams have nothing of themselves to give to others, that whatever is given is given by God, but just like the heart is an intermediate for the transmission of Divine Grace to the body. The Prophets and Imams, also, are intermediates for Divine Grace for human beings in all groups.

Think and Answer

1. What is the role of the Imam, peace be upon him, in the spiritual perfection of the human being?
2. What is the role of the Imam, peace be upon him, in the guarding of the Divine Law?
3. What is the role of the Imam, peace be upon him, in the issue of leadership of rule and the system of society?
4. What does 'final proof' mean and what role does the Imam play in this?
5. What does the intermediation of Grace mean? What is the best analogy which can be given for the role of the Prophets and Imams from this point of view?

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