

Lesson 9: The Purity Of The Prophets

1. Why must the Prophets be Ma'sūm?

The Wise and Merciful God sent the prophets so that human society may recognise the right way as opposed to the precipitous way, and may be able to stride up to the highest peaks of true pride, perfection and laudable virtues, and stay on that way.

With the same intention, God also made His prophets and messengers immune from every kind of sin and error, and, in one word, made them “infallible” (*ma'sūm*), so that they may be able to lead mankind towards God without any error or mistake.

It is obvious that the very same reason which prompted the need for prophethood also requires that the prophets be immaculate and immune from all kinds of sin, impurity, error and fault. Since the aim and purpose of sending prophets is to lead society towards God's commands, this aim is to be secured through the infallibility of the prophets, for it is clear that to do things which are repulsive or indecent, to sin, and also to be a source of error and fault is a reason for people to be averse to and diverted from these things, and thus the aim, which was the guidance and teaching of society, would be lost.

Of course, we know that no wise person does things against his aim, and that he takes regard for what is effectual in attaining and reaching his aim. For example, someone who wants a number of distinguished individuals to take part in a celebration in his honour knows that no one without an invitation can honourably attend. He will never send an invitation to someone who is averse to him, rather he will try to send his invitations in such a way that they will all be accepted, and, if he doesn't do this, his work will not have been prudent and wise, and it will be regarded as having been unseemly and unbecoming.

The Merciful and Wise God also takes account of what basically interferes with the guidance and education of society, and does not want people to depend on and follow the will of capricious and impure men, and so to end up far from, and be deprived of their true development. Therefore, He has sent immaculate prophets so that the guidance and instruction of society may be in the best possible way.

And now we shall read in more detail why the prophets must be without fault.

(A) The Principle Of Instruction

The purpose of sending the prophets was to educate humanity; and we know that in education, the teacher's behaviour is a more effective instrument than his speech and verbal instructions.

The character and actions of the teacher can bring about a radical transformation in man, because, on the basis of the principle of imitation, man gradually adopts the manner and conduct of his teacher, and becomes of the same colour so that it is as if he is the clear, limpid surface of a pool which reflects the image of the sky above him.

Speech alone cannot play the part of instruction, rather it serves instruction, and this is the idea of the prophetic mission, that prophets must possess praiseworthy habits and qualities and be untainted with sin and error so that they can effectively attract the people of this world towards the sacred aim.

It is clear that one who has soiled his hands with sin, even though in secret and without anyone being aware, will never have that unwavering strength of mind and spirit to bring about a radical transformation in the area of the human spirit. For example, a person who taints his lips with wine can never dissuade others from drinking it, and raise the voice of truth and mobilise his iron will in combating this act.

The secret of the prophets' success in their mission was the coordination in their words and deeds, and it is this moral strength which enabled them to transform the fundamentals of human thoughts and lead societies towards perfection.

(B) Confidence & Acceptance

The greater the degree of faith and confidence that people have in a speaker, the more their agreement with him increases, and vice versa. For this reason, the prophets, who divulged the Divine commands and restrained people from sin and immorality, must, according to this assertion, be endowed with the greatest, most admirable qualities, and be free from every kind of sin and indecency, every error and mistake. This is so that people's confidence and faith in them may be greater and they may accept their guidance and what they say, and so that people may strive more assiduously in carrying out the plans and putting into practice the reformative instructions of the prophets, and understand from the depths of their hearts their leadership.

Thus the aim of the prophetic mission, that is to say the leading of the human race to development on all sides, will be accomplished; the aim of the prophetic mission will not be obtained under any other circumstances, and that would be very far from the wisdom of God.

This purity and worthiness of the prophets was so extraordinary that people became devoted to them to such a degree that their followers felt great love towards them and gave up their lives in following and

obeying them, without heed for the consequences.

However, the question as to how one man can be completely free from sin and error is a matter to which we shall now turn our attention.

2. How can a person be Ma'sūm?

(A) Real Love Of God:

The holy prophets were deeply devoted to God, and why should they not have been? They, who with their senses and profound insight knew God better than anyone, who understood His Greatness, Splendour and Majesty to be above all things, who deem Him alone worthy of love, devotion and obedience, who had nothing except His Pleasure in view, who gave their hearts to none but Him, who did everything with devotion to Him, and who knew Who they were worshipping.

It was for this very reason that the prophets welcomed difficulties and formidable situations, and also paid attention to God with smiling, open faces even when they were in the most critical circumstances. And so, when, in their beloved, true way, they met with difficulties, they became overflowing with joy.

History has recorded the endeavours of these heavenly, torch-bearing men of guidance, as also the condemnable behaviour of people towards them. Could steadfastness in these difficulties have had another motivation apart from love of God and the performance of His command? Surely not.

How can it be imagined that those who are completely engrossed in their beloved way, and who utter nothing except according to His wish, and in whose heart, soul, spirit and thoughts not one corner is empty of remembrance of Him, can disobey His commands? Or can give themselves up to sin? Rather, they followed the path of obedience to Him and were devoted to Him.

Someone asked the Prophet of Islam, why he himself indulged in worship of God to such an extent that he would physically suffer since he was purified and had no sins. His answer was that why should he not be a grateful and thankful slave of God?¹ So it was not out of fear of punishment that the Prophet used to worship God to such an extent, it was out of a sense of gratitude.

Thus we can understand that the perfect knowledge of the prophets and the deep and true love which they had for God resulted in infallibility and absolute purity, so that, in addition to precluding sin from their will and thinking, they withheld themselves from sin.

(B) The Deep & Perfect Insight of The Prophets

Perceptiveness is not the same in everyone. Someone who is ignorant and illiterate will never think like a doctor does about microbes and the contamination of vessels by them. A doctor who has spent years investigating microbes, has watched them multiply under a microscope, and has witnessed the fate of

those who were infected by them can never neglect microbes and their dangers.

Thus we see that the ignorant person proceeds to drink water contaminated with microbes and has no worry, whereas the doctor would never be prepared to drink such water and would never even entertain the idea.

The only motive for refraining from drinking is the knowledge and information which this doctor has concerning the bad effects of microbes. So, for example, the illiterate, ignorant person would also keep himself from eating something filthy, for, in this case, he is aware of the impurity and harmful effects of it. But a one year old child into whose reach that filthy thing falls would probably put it into his mouth.

Another point is that there are some people who attach little importance to incremental harm, although they fear sudden, unexpected dangers and avoid them. For example, someone may be rather lazy about extracting a decayed tooth and may procrastinate about resorting to a dentist, till such time as his other teeth become affected, and a great deal more discomfort comes his way. The toll for this is that he may be affected by very serious ailments. However, the very same person, as soon as the pain of appendicitis appears and there is a possibility of real danger, will entrust himself into the hands of a surgeon without any delay.

Ordinary people take a superficial view of evil, and do not take sufficient note of its physical and spiritual, bodily and psychological effects.

However, the prophets, who, with the help of a higher power, have supremacy in their vision and knowledge over the rest of mankind, who have a profound and perfect insight into all the effects of evil, and who, by a secret witnessing, see even those effects of evil which will materialize in the next world, will never come under the influence of their own bodily desires and soil their hands with the contamination of sin; even the thought of it will never enter their hearts.

In short, remembrance of judgment and the preview of the effects of sin in the next world was the best way to keep the prophets from sin and indecency.

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This lesson is based on the following: Dar Rah-e Haq, *The Roots of Religion* (1981) Qum, Iran.

Question Paper on Lesson 9

Question 1: [16 points]

Fill in the blanks from the pool of words given below by simply placing the number of the correct word in the blank space.

(a) A teacher's conduct undoubtedly _____ his students' _____.

(b) For greatest impact, a prophet must instill _____ in his followers.

(c) It was their true _____ and real _____ of God that made prophets free from sins and impurities.

(d) The reason why prophets refrained from committing sins was that they could _____ the effects of evil deeds.

(e) The prophetic mission required prophets to demonstrate extremely high _____ character and ethical _____.

1. foresee
2. love
3. standards
4. character
5. moral
6. affects
7. knowledge
8. confidence

Question 2: [10 points]

Tick the appropriate box:

- (a) Infallibility means complete immunity from sins.
- (b) Prophets cannot commit sins because of the nature of their creation.
- (c) An imperfect teacher cannot deliver perfect teaching.
- (d) Mas'ūm refers to those prophets and imams who are free from errors and sins.
- (e) Prophets were immune from sins but they could make unintentional sins.

Question 3: [12 points]

Briefly discuss two reasons on why the prophets must be ma'sūm.

Question 4: [12 points]

Is infallibility an acquired quality or is it bestowed upon the prophets by God?

1. Nūrū 'th-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 367.

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