

Lesson Five: Duties and Responsibilities of the Prophets

In the previous lesson, it was concluded that the chosen Prophets of God have certain responsibilities towards God and the people. This lesson is aimed at discussing these responsibilities.

Our discussion here does not include such matters as the establishment of a monotheistic society and a prophetic government, not meaning that these matters have not been part of the Prophets' missions. They have definitely been aimed for and the Prophets have come to establish the ideal society for mankind).

If fact, responsibility or mission here means the change that the Prophets bring about within the human being, for founding a just, monotheistic society is impossible without constructed human beings in the same way as a social revolution is inseparable from an inner revolution among people.

This change and provocation originate from the heart of the Prophet, encompass the hearts of people and finally lead to inner explosions among the arisen and faithful individuals. Should the means of such provocation be available (for which the Prophets are responsible) then it would be time to construct society and establish the monotheistic system.

Now, we will study the Prophets' responsibilities in the following words of the Commander of the Faithful "Then God sent His Messengers and series of His Prophets towards them to help 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..."

With this general policy, the Prophets connected themselves with the people and their inner selves. i.e., with these aims and manners of developing human beings in their mind, they began their missions and on these same bases they tried to establish the Islamic community. Thus, in all dimensions of the Islamic community such as education, economics, government, human relations, etc., nothing contradictory to these aims should be found.

For example, if in an Islamic community something creates forgetfulness instead of 'recalling', that is against the philosophy behind the Prophets' appointment to prophethood. In fact, all the social signs of an Islamic system, i.e. all those things that constitute the minor and major structures of an Islamic community, should induce people to "fulfill the pledges of His creation".

These five programs (to which the Commander of the Faithful refers) were compensatory for the deficiencies existent among people during the age of ignorance when Prophets were absent – deficiencies and short comings mentioned in this same Sermon, which we analyzed before under the title 'mental, social and ... backgrounds to prophethood' ("In the course of time many people perverted God's trust with them...").

What is this 'trust' or 'covenant'? It is the human being's absolute servitude towards God, the human being has a commitment towards God and that is worshipping none but Him. Worshipping other than God means submission to others, whether it be mental, physical, doctrinal or practical. The human being is actually responsible to submit to no one except God but this does not mean that one has accepted this responsibility without having had power and a free will to reject it. The human being's nature and one's inner mechanism conform to the servitude and worship of God. These are, in fact, hidden in humanity's primordial nature. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Made I not covenant with you, children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan – surely he is a manifest foe to you? And that ye should worship me, (for that) this was the straight way?"
(36:60-61)

After appointment, the Prophets ask human beings to destroy the change and distortion which they have brought about in God's trust and to make contact with God on the basis of their covenant with Him ("fulfill the pledges of His creation". This is the very removal of deficiencies of the age of ignorance, the age in which 'God's position remains unknown', the age when Prophets come to recall God's bounties to people.

Asking people to fulfill their natural covenant with God is not a complementary matter. It has a general and, at the same time, absolute concept involving propagation through mere speaking, providing the addressee with final reasoning and teaching purification of the people through controlled behavior. In the Holy Qur'an we read", ***Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best ...***" (16: 125)

In this verse, God asks the Prophet to expose the simple minds of the people and the adversaries to wisdom at the beginning stages and after a firm foundation for reasoning is achieved, guide them by preaching. These results in the purification of the mind and soul and, as the final stage, prevent them from establishing wrong reasoning, argue with them and convince them.

Concerning their relationship with human beings, Prophets are obliged and responsible to remove mental obstacles. Thus, those individuals or regimes that bring about such obstacles are opposed and fought by the Prophets. Accordingly, the Prophet's asking the people to fulfill their natural covenant

ranges from wisdom and reasoning to the Islamic jihad (religious and spiritual struggle in the way of God for the removal of the obstacles).

The 'natural covenant' and humanity's primordial nature (i.e. worshipping God alone) are in conformity with the natural structure of the whole universe. Therefore, all the decrees and regulations of the Divine Law, which are incumbent on human beings, conform to human nature. This is clarified in several verses of the Holy Qur'an. Examples are as follows,

“So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the faith: (establish) God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by God. (30:30)

In Sura Ar-Rahman, some of the verses speak of humanity's structure and Attributes and of the time of creation such as

“(God) most Gracious! It is He who has taught the Qur'an... He has created mankind...”

Some others refer to natural phenomena such as the following,

“ The sun and the moon follow, courses (exactly) computed; and the stars and the trees – both (alike) bow, in adoration. And the firmament hat He raised high, and He has set up balance (of justice...” (55:5-7)

It should be noticed here that by 'bowing in adoration' the Qur'an implies that natural phenomena are in a state of submission towards God and move according to specific rules and regulations. It should also be observed that the, balance, has nothing to do with plants, sun, moon, etc., but exclusively for humanity's good and evil deeds to be recognized and measured.

Then the Qur'an continues,

“In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice.”

This means that human beings should not violate the laws of creation (natural laws) and religious laws, which are in a state of balance and conformity. Accordingly human beings are obliged to maintain this practical connection with nature (i.e. natural laws).

Thus, when human beings or the community move against the Divine Law and regulations, they are actually moving against the primordial nature of humanity and the world. And the Prophets come to bring this 'natural covenant' (covenant with God which originates from humanity's heart and warrants a kind of harmony between one's actions and movements and the structure of the Universe) to the stage of action.

Another duty of the Prophets, according to the Commander of the Faithful is to recall to people the

forgotten bounties of God. Human beings forget many of God's bounties and blessings; the most important of which being one's 'self' which is the axis for all God's blessings. We read in the Qur'an:

“And be not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their proper selves”. (59: 18)

One's 'self' (that great but forgotten blessing), despite being not more than one thing, has various effects and manifestations. Thus, forgetting it is to forget those tools and means by which one can attain knowledge and recognition means of thinking, means of decision-making, means of innovation and means of accepting responsibility, the lack of each, damages one as a human being. By means of thinking and the power of analysis, one acquires knowledge and understanding and finds the ways. And through one's 'free will' one has the ability to choose.

Now when one distinguishes the right way from the wrong and chooses it, one can perfect the self through innovation and disclose the dead-ends. In fact, lack of innovation and initiative prevent one from going the way of perfection and making progress in the fields of culture, civilization, industry knowledge and morality. Finally, when one consciously chooses the way, one becomes responsible. A person confronts cases in which one should act as well as cases in which one should refuse to act. If one does not understand the case well and if one lacks free will to choose, one will have no responsibility. But if one understands it well and one has freedom of choice, then a person will be responsible.

On the whole, in an ignorant society, human beings forget one or all of these four characteristics, and the Prophets came to recall to them what they had forgotten. This is why the empty-handed and uncultured people who are reminded by the Prophets of their own 'self' and, as a result of their beliefs in God, they can stand firmly against the most stable political systems and gain victory.

The Commander of the Faithful enumerates the duties of the Prophets, saying, „to exhort them by preaching...”. The Prophet is responsible to propagate his message; otherwise, revelation remains a monopoly with him and, thus, two dimensions of prophethood are left unrealized. The Holy Qur'an affirms this

“And remember God took a covenant from the people of the Book, to make it known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it...” (3: 187)

Should the Prophet not fulfill this responsibility, the problems related to prophethood will remain unsolved. This is also true with an Islamic community in which propaganda plays a great role. In fact, it is not Islamic if a community falls short in propagating the message of God.

The Commander of the Faithful continues, «to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom», meaning that the Prophets should call people to thinking, contemplation and wisdom which all human beings possess in their nature.

The power of thinking and contemplation may be weak in a community and land or among a Generation not necessarily because of geographical conditions, racial deficiencies or stupidity but due to the fact that powerful classes and seekers of dominance prevent people from correct thinking and stop the development of minds by different means (such as the wrong systems of education, prevailing nowadays in underdeveloped countries, which cause minds to be accustomed to various formulas and remain undeveloped due to lack of necessary practices).

As was mentioned before, the power of thinking is a property common to all human beings. But sometimes it is buried (by customs and traditions or by ruling systems) and made a treasure from which no benefit is derived, a treasure hidden behind the curtain of whims and fancies, false imaginations, legends, distorted matters and absurd ideas under the name of religion, philosophy and science.

In fact, the holders of power, wealth and deceit (kings, priests, pseudo-theologians and the wealthy) dispossess human beings from the power of thinking or do not provide them with the means for the development of thought (this is the very colonial program enforced in colonialized countries).

This is where the Prophets arise and unveil the treasures of thought and wisdom, inviting people to contemplation. This is observed in the following verses of the Qur'an, which call people to think about the most common phenomena of the world and to see in them the wonder, which is usually hidden from the eyes of human beings.

“Do they not look at the canals, how they are made?” (88: 17),

“Then let man look at his food (and how we provide it)...” (80:24)

“For what we pour forth water in abundance and we split the earth in fragments.” (80:25–26)

These events and phenomena to which the Qur'an refers are quite common and familiar to human beings, yet when they contemplate them, their minds gradually develop and become active. This development of the mind is clearly seen in the Islamic community during early Islam when Muslims arose 'n a short period of time from the depths of ignorance and short sightedness to such heights that they soon came to be known as the founders of experimental sciences and great universities.

Another task that the Prophets fulfilled and to which the Commander of the Faithful makes a reference is “and show them the signs of His Omnipotence”, meaning that they provided the people with manifestations of the divine power. This is what he himself does in this very Sermon¹, i.e. he refers to some examples of the heavenly signs to persuade people to think about them.

He continues: His Omnipotence, namely the sky which is raised over them, the earth that is placed beneath them, means of living that sustain them, deaths that make them die, aliments that turn them old, incidents that successively betake them.

What is this ceiling (sky) over our head? It is a collection of air, space, stars and so forth, to which we

have grown accustomed, yet something that provokes us to think what it really is and, as a result, provides us with understanding and recognition. Newton acquired the very recognition concerning a great reality by paying careful attention to a natural and very common incident to which no one before him had contemplated.

He simply asked why the things did not go up but rather fell vertically down when they were freed in the air, and subsequently he discovered the powerful force of gravity. In fact, all scientific progress and developments in the field of astronomy have originated from the very attentiveness to which the Prophets always called the people.

What is this bed (earth) beneath man's feet? What has it been created from? What is beneath it? Where would we reach, should we excavate the earth? These are the questions from which such sciences as geology, mining, etc., originate.

What is the food, which maintains life? How is it prepared? Why is it needed and why should we try to obtain it? What is living with all its aspects such as speaking, walking, eating, etc., and what is death and becoming lifeless and silent? What causes one to grow old? Why is one happy and glad at one stage of life and exhausted, weak and disable at another stage? The answers to these questions and the careful study of such events and phenomena (life, death, youth, old age etc.) induce human beings to employ their minds and activate them. This is why the Prophets have to show the signs of God's power to the people.

[1.](#) Sermon No. 1.

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